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ANOTHER PART OF THE FOREST

ANOTHER PART OF THE FOREST

BY G. B. STERN

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1941


WORLD CLUB
VIA RADIO
ON

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To
JACK

“Escape is surely legitimate when it only means a brief while to relax and forget before we return to our job.”

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PART ONE

“All Things Lovely”

Part One

"ALL THINGS LOVELY"

AN ENGLISHMAN in Hollywood sent home for his cook. In due course he took her to Santa Monica. "That's the Pacific," he said. "It's bigger than the Atlantic." She gazed for a moment at the expanse of ocean; then she said with respectful admiration: "Yes, I can see that."

I like this story because religion lies in it, though it may take me a whole book to find out exactly where and why.

Truth rarely behaves like a squatter. I mean, it does not settle down beside us and remain there where we can put our hand on it if wanted; on the contrary, it flashes up at us with a fugitive promise of here tomorrow, gone today, and is off again before we even have time to say: "'Strewth."

You sometimes experience these godlike, tantalising flashes when going in or coming out of a drug or an anæsthetic. Once, in a hurry to save my life, a doctor gave me a shot of morphia and a half-bottle of champagne following several days when, believe it or not, I had refused all food. That treatment had an astonishing effect. When your friends laconically advise you to "rise above it," they hardly realise how almost impossible such levitation of the spirit can be. You rise an inch or two and then flop again. But at that moment of which I am telling you, I rose above it grandly: I saw that nothing mattered; not my own petty sorrows and

pains and fears, nor (to be frank) anyone else's; I swung free of it all, higher and higher, like Tarzan in the treetops; at last, after more than forty years of an inner life which functioned like an erratic pendulum, I achieved the perfect sense of proportion. At last I was visited by one glorious announcement of truth, instead of a battalion of half-truths. At last I had succeeded in putting salt on the tail of a flying bird.

To save repetition, I will henceforward simply call it the flash.

An old copy of *Punch* gives us a picture of a small boy in bed, lying on his back kicking joyfully at the air, bubbling and curling with *joie de vivre*: "Uncle John, what do you do when you feel *too* well in the morning?" The reactions of Uncle John, shown sketchily in his shaving mirror, hardly come into it; with him, the question did not arise. The small boy, of course, besides being a fiend, was an illustration of Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality"; Uncle John was the second half of that poem. The small boy was living at the very heart of the flash. Uncle John was not.

Here in Brambleford where, because of the war, I have spent the autumn of 1939 and the spring and autumn of 1940, though not the season between, horses are all over the place; so it was not only a charming but an appropriate present that a friend made me, of a walking-stick with a horse-measure inside: you unscrew the top and pull out the measure and catch your horse. Nobody has yet given me a cyanometer inside a walking-stick; a cyanometer, says the dictionary, is an "instrument for measuring blueness of sky"; but indeed, while taking their word for it, I would rather leave the immeasurable blue unmeasured; and will even turn pedant and argue that I had been told that the blue of the sky is not blue at all, and that we in our innocence are deceived by one of the

loveliest optical delusions; it is just ether, they assured me. So why should a dictionary— But nobody ever yet closed a dictionary with a bang without first being charmed by just one other word accidentally glimpsed on the same page; in this case it was “cutty-stool”: “seat in Sc. churches where unchaste women sat to receive public rebuke during service.”

I have two other sticks in my collection with tops that unscrew to reveal a surprise inside; one conceals a long slender flask full of brandy (less than two teaspoonfuls). This was an American prohibition stick. Anyone to whom I show it is pretty certain to say in a thrilled voice, “Is it *real* brandy?” gazing in awe at me the toper, and thus showing that simple wonder in the human race has not yet been numbed by greater wonders. The other stick contains a slender brass telescope with an inscription from more gracious days: “L’Ingr. Chevallier Opticien du Roi. Tour de L’Horloge du Palais à Paris.” Except for the fact that I bought this one myself, it might well be the favourite among my sixty-odd walking-sticks. But one cannot help preferring those that drop as the gentle rain from heaven. When I was very young, I saw several plays of which I can remember nothing except that a gallant sailor-boy rushed onto the stage and poured bags and bags of shining gold coins into an unprotesting female lap, while he exclaimed breathlessly, “Little Sweetheart, this is all for you!” or “This is all for my darling Arrangement-in-black-and-grey” (the picture which to most of the inaccurate human race is known as “Whistler’s Mother,” was laconically called by Whistler, “Arrangement in Black and Grey”). Since then I have become more and more convinced that these things do not happen often enough in daily life. Surely, whenever we are feeling stagnant and cross, one of the household might so easily rush in and announce: “Three parcels waiting for you in the hall! One has come a bit undone at the end and looks as

though it were a Phantom Rolls-Royce! And the other two are smaller, from Cartier's! Do come and open them!"

They should be anonymous, of course, so that the question need never arise of scribbling inadequate little notes beginning:

Thank you very much for the very beautiful car. I'm sure I shall often use it. It was so kind of you to think of me.

And:

How just like you to send sapphires! They are my favourite stone. Really, you do spoil me. I am working you a tea-cosy with a cottage on it.

I suspect that this longing for the unexpected arrival of the moon, or sapphires, or a white pony with a long tail, or similar donations towards keeping a roof over one's head, is in essence no more greedy than nostalgic longing for glamour: not for the solid worth of the gifts themselves but for the way of their entrance, the rapture of incredulous amazement, the tearing open of the dull grey envelope we call today—the iridescent proof that we are not exempt from abundance and windfall. The natives of certain tribes, when they came to visit Queen Victoria, used to lay most wonderful gifts at her feet. Custom, not meanness, dictated that they should carry the gifts away again when they left; nevertheless, she must have had some exhilarating moments out of it. Cetewayo, the Zulu chieftain, sent her a chair made out of his own skin; at least, he directed that it should be done after his death; and until recently you could have seen it at Windsor Castle and (if you liked) sat on it. It is not extremely comfortable, but, as I always say, it's the thought that matters.

Let us now return to the same friend in Brambleford who had given me the walking-stick with the horse-measure in-

side. (I have always longed to use the phrase “Let us now return” in the frank Victorian style, just as I have lusted to write “Meanwhile our reader will be wondering” or “But of this more hereafter.” Other authors will probably agree that they take away from the ghastly appearance of striving to be natural when the thing is impossible.) By a happy instinct for choosing the right gift for the right moment, she also presented me with a copy of one of my own books which happened to be “Monogram,” my first rough attempt at irrelevant and incomplete autobiography. When you are given the present of a nice book, the least you can do is to sit down and read it. I read “Monogram,” eagerly and with delight. I said to myself very often, “Fancy!” and “How true!” I even wrote these comments in the margin, and several times: for this was my own book and so, damn it, I could treat it as unceremoniously as I pleased—play merry hell with it. I possessed, like other authors, an official copy retained with difficulty out of the six which are sent us to distribute among our friends; but that stood in a row with my other books (not Works; you may not call them Works until you have a uniform edition and are dead yourself). But this copy of “Monogram,” seriously presented to me three years after publication, was unofficial, unexpected and unsolicited. Whenever I re-read one of my own books (a more than rare occurrence) I get violently depressed and irritated, either because I say in senile despondency, “I shall never be able to write like that again—I expect someone else wrote it,” or because I am aghast at the idea that I could actually have let such feeble inarticulate stuff, containing hardly a hint of what I really meant to say, get loose into the world. But reading “Monogram” did neither of these things to me; I was cheerfully interested, that is all. And particularly interested in the formula.

The next page or two is going to be in confidence between

myself and whoever happens to be Constant Reader. It may therefore be skipped by whoever happens to be inconstant reader. I would rather it were skipped than that the book should be thrown down in permanent exasperation.

When you are writing what is neither a story, nor an autobiography, nor memoirs, nor essays, but a series of ellipses linked together by a series of personal and urgent unimportances, you have to decide first by what formula to link them. Even if you do not find an excellent formula, at least it will show that you have taken trouble, and your reader, quite rightly, approves of your taking trouble; at least while you are at the planning stage; presently you often have to leave formulas to look after themselves. For once you have started, you begin to get excited over what is likely to emerge as your theme. Your theme is what really matters; your theme is what links all the smaller pieces together; but it cannot be discovered till after you have begun, sometimes not until you have nearly finished; and sometimes you are surprised when you do discover it, for it has no prenatal consciousness. At present I only know for certain that somehow or other it is bound to be mixed up with the flash; and that it will hover on the rim of the Pacific, which is bigger than the Atlantic; and that being in Brambleford because of the war may help to shape it. And when I foolishly said just now, "I only know for certain," I forgot I was not certain at all, for the theme bloweth where it listeth.

The formula, however, has to be cut though not dried before you even set out on your hopeful but hazardous quest for the theme; hazardous, because if you fail to find it (and there are no guarantees) your book remains babble and Babel without any rising sense of truth to bless it at the end. Confucius was right to say that he who heard the truth in the morning might die content in the evening. No, he was wrong. For one

who had heard the truth on earth, life on earth, thus passionately illuminated, would be more than ever worth while.

In “Monogram” I picked up at random three small objects from my sitting-room: A blue glass dragon, a mosaic paper-weight and—what was the other? A picture of a little white dog on the panel of an old door, I believe; or a piece of the Grand Canyon that cost me a dollar. Starting in turn from each of these objects, I travelled by association. Being as honest as I could, and recollecting all the while that irrelevance can charm but incoherence merely irritate, I waited to see where they would lead me, and whether at the end of each part I might find myself in the same place though by a different route. I did not expect anyone else to be as breathless about this as myself, because naturally I was the most concerned. It became almost a matter of private investigation done (I trust not indecently) in public.

It is not a bad formula. I recognised this again as I re-read the copy of “Monogram” which had been given me as a present. Mrs. Patrick Campbell, in playing the Matriarch, had said to me in her deep handsome emphatic tones, the stress always laid wilfully but effectively: “I *like* this part, Peter; I can *turn round* in it.” And turn she did; indeed, she waltzed round in it. But of this, as we Victorians say, more hereafter. But also she said to me (for I cannot quite wait till hereafter), “Peter, I want you to write me a part that will fit me like a glove,” and her hands described a thrilling flexible motion from her neck downwards, following her own body as though she were fitting a glove to it. “Yes,” I replied, wide-eyed and willing to do my best, as an inexperienced dramatist ought to be in the presence of genius, “and what sort of woman shall I make her?” Mrs. Campbell pondered a moment; then she commanded with absolute sincerity: “Write me a part about a woman who is *all goodness*.” And again her

hands assisted her to make a grand descriptive movement from within her breast, flinging all goodness to the world. This fragment of dialogue, in which the actress so amazingly saw herself as a sort of Irene Forsythe (which, Heaven knows and Heaven be thanked, she was not), happened in Bond Street when she had suddenly determined to walk me out of rehearsal and buy me a pair of gloves as a mark of her fitful esteem. I still have those gloves, pale fawn, lovely and soft in texture as a magnolia.

Meanwhile our readers will be wondering how I shall contrive transport back to formulas and Monograms and so forth, without a homemade link. Homemade links are bad. Re-reading "Monogram," I discovered one which made me blush for its clumsiness and lack of intelligent disguise. I remember painfully manufacturing it and hoping it would hold. Links are usually more grateful and obliging, and appear spontaneously. Now, via that copy of "Monogram" which I was reading only because it had been given me as a present, wondering while I read what could be the formula for this second "Monogram," now came the familiar humming in the air . . . and already from not too far away, irrelevance has carried me to a pair of gloves given me as a present—

And here was my formula. Presents. I always prefer working from objects to working from abstractions. From objects small and compact and unsymbolic; objects of substance and texture, warm and familiar to everyone as a hearthrug or a cup or a spool of silk; objects that you can lay your hand on in a moment; you will never be able to lay your hands on a theme, but you can pick up a pair of gloves or a copy of "Monogram," and say, "Now we're off."

For we all know about presents, presents given at Christmas and weddings and at anniversaries, or for love's sake alone, or at random because someone suddenly liked you, or because,

like myself, you collected walking-sticks. Of course several hundreds of presents I have had will have to be left in limbo for my purpose. No cataloguing, if you please. Liberty, fraternity, austerity. A paragraph in a local paper told me a few weeks ago that orders had been given to “prune the railings” at Brighton, and use them for battleships.

A short time ago I had to drive up from Berkshire through Western London. Wherever I looked I became aware of railings, still in their rusty iron slumber, but dangerously potential; a delirium of railings planted in a frenzy most often where they could not possibly have been needed; as stoutly reinforcing a stout wall; as guarding sturdy little posts that would obviously rather have remained self-reliant; as shielding triangles of trodden grass that once were plague-pits (but this is no time to be out of date); as lining up in front of well-shuttered shops and barricading blind alleys; railings defensive and offensive; and railings content to stand in pure decoration (*sic*); an abundance, an orgy, an ecstasy of superfluous railings, which at a certain period in our history of architecture must have rushed down upon the city and conquered it with the same enthusiasm that great Birnam Wood once came to Dunsinane.

I have little doubt but that driving north, south or east, now that my attention was awake to railings, I should have seen them four times multiplied, striping our parks and our streets and our squares with bad-tempered vigilance. For the soul of railings is essentially rigid and narrow-minded, not to compare with benevolent cheerful wooden fencing which swirls into friendly knots and peepholes; but with the vicious snarl of barbed wire, the cruel jagged repartee of broken glass stuck upright on top of a wall.

Had we ever paused, down the peaceful years, to reflect upon the solemnity of a life guarded by railings, it might have

seemed a little bit foolish. What did they fear, these nineteenth century folk, that they retired behind such preposterous regiments of iron? For though it is difficult to trace the very first man who cried "Eureka!" and leapt to his feet, inspired to design the very first railing, and triumphantly planted it, and having accomplished his life's work, went satisfied to bed, yet most volumes of authority agree in yielding up the date 1812 for the beginning of railings in their multitudes; why this should coincide with the burning of Moscow is a matter that gives play to the most charming conjecture (or perhaps it was merely accident). What did they fear? They could not, even they, have thought that now and for ever they were adequately protected from the foe (their songs and ballads show us that enemies were always "foemen" in a Victorian world).

A proper valediction to railings could be illustrated with the picture of a disconsolate ghost in flowing whiskers and Albert watch-chain, weeping over a symbolical railing offered up to serve its country in time of war. For now, in time of war, the whole matter quite simply reverts to sanity: Is this not the very thing we are fighting for, that bars should be translated into battleships, and battleships into freedom?

A London child of the past, probably also a Brighton child or a Birmingham child, always accepted railings as a matter of course, created as part of a seven-day universe; plenty of juvenile uses for railings; but chiefly for that urchin impulse to run along drawing a hoopstick across them, making sweet music. Friendly errand-boys leant their bicycles against the area railings outside your house, and then clattered with their baskets down the deep Victorian steps to deep basements copied from the Italians.

Just beyond the railings at the entrance of Kensington Gardens stood the woman with the balloons and the man with the

toy windmills. Once inside, the railings did not bother you at all: you soon discovered, though they stood upright in sentinel rows along two sides of a grass enclosure, along the third they irrationally dipped to a low rail running horizontally only a foot high from the path, so that all you had to do, you and your dog, was to skip across the low boundary and go capering back to forbidden territory with perfect ease and a clear conscience. Yes, nice familiar things, railings, that made your gloves dirty, and who cared except Nannie?

Usually, in spring, when the awnings went up and the window-boxes blossomed, the railings became a freshly painted menace, vivid and sticky and very, very beautiful. "Don't touch, child, they're wet!" You smiled seraphically; you had already touched, and proved it for yourself.

Your parents had a garden with walls, but how much more fascinating were those little private squares, exclusive to the residents who lived in the houses on four sides; and how lucky, how happy was your friend whose discriminating parents had chosen to live in one of these houses, with a special key to the square guarded by iron railings!

But today we must put away childish things; put away our hoopsticks and toy balloons. Children of the future may find funny problems set for them in their arithmetic books: If three men and a boy can pull up 240 yards of railings in four days, and assuming that a boy and a half equals one man, how long would it take one man and five boys to pull up 17,542 yards? And not seeing those phantom battleships, they will look on it as just another beastly sum, with no more emotion than we in our youth looked on those three men and a boy who were eternally papering walls at so much per square yard. Yet for us today, Lewis Carroll has materialised into sober sense, and we are not derided for asking how many aluminum saucepans go to make a tea-tray in the sky.

Do you remember a fantasy by G. K. Chesterton called "The Napoleon of Notting Hill"? A mighty saga of patriotism, reduced to miniature scale and brilliantly coloured as from a child's paintbox, which told how the men of North Kensington and Bayswater and Knightsbridge and all the boroughs of London, with banners and war-cries, leapt one by one to fight for or against the aggressor who tried to seize a tiny sweets and tobacco shop in Pump Street, Notting Hill Gate, belonging to Adam Wayne, that fiery young champion of derelict causes.

"Walking along Pump Street with a friend, he said, as he gazed dreamily at the iron fence of a little front garden, 'How those railings stir one's blood!'

"His friend, who was also a great intellectual admirer, looked at them painfully, but without any particular emotion. He was so troubled about it that he went back quite a large number of times on quiet evenings and stared at the railings, waiting for something to happen to his blood, but without success. At last he took refuge in asking Wayne himself. He discovered that the ecstasy lay in the one point he had never noticed about the railings even after his six visits—the fact that they were, like the great majority of others in London, shaped at the top after the manner of a spear. As a child, Wayne had half unconsciously compared them with the spears in pictures of Lancelot and St. George, and had grown up under the shadow of the graphic association. Now, whenever he looked at them, they were simply the serried weapons that made a hedge of steel round the sacred homes of Notting Hill. He could not have cleansed his mind of that meaning even if he had tried. It was not a fanciful comparison, or anything like it. It would not have been true to say that the familiar railings reminded him of spears: it would have been

far truer to say that the familiar spears occasionally reminded him of railings.”

“The Napoleon of Notting Hill” is a fantasy and a fable, yet the Battle of Edwardes Square, which sounds as richly improbable, was actually fought in 1911; we do not know whether, in fact, a wooden horse was cunningly pushed into Troy, causing its heroic downfall, but we do know, by the evacuation of Dunkirk, which already seems woven into golden legend, that never before has the world of reality more closely resembled the most thrilling nonsense, the most impossible myth. Indeed, you can hardly separate them as you live through one and read of the other. Was the Ark lifted above the Flood more ark than England now, as she gathers inside her walls a motley crowd of survivors, wearing strange uniforms of fairy tale and fancy dress, speaking strange tongues, presently to be seen strolling amicably with our own people across little green oases flush with the grey city pavements? For once the railings are down, those solid but boring arguments for privacy, human nature will be no more likely to walk respectfully outside and around invisible barriers than it could praise with any conviction the wonderful clothes worn by a stark naked emperor. “Keep off the grass” has never been a favourite sign; the child in every grown-up has always hoped something might happen one day to cause iron railings to fall flat upon the ground, as they did in the dream of Kipling’s Brushwood Boy, a universal wish-fulfilment dream.

Gertie Miller, years ago, sang a popular song called “Keep Off the Grass”; you heard the refrain everywhere: “Play at your ease, but if you please, keep off the grass in the garden”—as though you *could* play at your ease and still keep off the grass. Rupert Brooke, while he sat in a café in Berlin, suddenly for that very reason became the most homesick poet in the world:

*Unkempt about those hedges blows
An English unofficial rose;
And there the unregulated sun
Slopes down to rest when day is done,
And wakes a vague unpunctual star,
A slippered Hesper; and there are
Meads towards Haslingfield and Coton
Where das Betreten's not verboten.**

Had he not died in 1915 he would have raised a glad shout to see the railings go down in 1940.

Nevertheless, as the appeal has until now been without compulsion, for a voluntary yield of this odd iron harvest, the residents and owners of our private squares have to combat an obstinate few who desire to remain religious in worship of their railings and the present emptiness within.

Perhaps one, or at most two forlorn ladies can still be seen taking either themselves or the dog for a walk; their faces show no visible beatitude in this extreme privilege of sanctuary; still the die-hards see to it that the gate is padlocked; still the old custodian, on inquiry, mumbles his antediluvian ritual; still the old gardener remains remotely preoccupied with matters not unconnected with the bedding-out of asters. Heil, Rip Van Winkle! I met you or your prototype the other day when you were being squeezed not quite to death in a first-class railway carriage, and you grumbled (little pet!): "Why do they keep on moving these troops? Why can't they *stay where they are?*"

Every moment since the war began, offers us the chance to make a gesture. If we can fling our time, our business, our savings, our small yachts and fishing-smacks and pleasure-boats, our wedding rings and waste paper, our cocoa tin containers and frying-pans into one united effort, then surely the owners

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and residents of the houses round the squares can fling in their privacy as well. After all, how much easier than the heart-break of giving up your own flower garden in which you have toiled and weeded! In these charming squares you may have walked for ten minutes, or sat and thought the sunset agreeable; you may have complained a little if the path has not been properly swept after the fall of leaves in last night's wind, or if the caretaker's child has been allowed an illegitimate scamper which butted into your sacred knees.

Railings round the old plague-pits; a ghost of a cart rumbling and rattling, a bell, a call: "Give up your dead!" The summons through London streets in the year of plague would, if echoed today, strike an even less agreeable note than *Give up your railings!* Nor can sacrifice be achieved at a dribbling pace: it needs the impetus not only of a high cause but of a very passion of urgency. "The broadening of human thought is a slow and complex process. We do go on, we do get on. But . . . Oh, God! one wants a gale out of Heaven, one wants a great wind from the sea!" This was written in "The New Machiavelli," the first Wells novel I ever read.

All the same, let us be fair; the desire for sanctuary, special and solitary, is as fundamental as the opposite desire to do away with frontiers and barriers and to ramble carelessly on everybody's grass. Instinctively we hollow out for ourselves all sorts of jolly little caves and corners wherever we go: that restaurant table in the alcove; a railway carriage to ourselves; a small attractive bathing-beach backed by white cliff walls; instantly we adopt these as our own, and try every means, legitimate and dirty-dog, to keep out the trespasser who might equally well have called them his. Can you on your honour state that you have never said petulantly, "You're sitting in *my* chair"?

Snobbery may be a superficial reason for stubborn reluc-

tance to surrender table, railway carriage, bathing-beach and armchair; a deeper reason is the longing for quiet—and especially for green quiet. Once upon a time, it was difficult to make a corner in quiet, and refuse to share it; for though hitherto, from the noise point of view, one half of the world knew only too well how the other half lived, the other half continued to rejoice in cheerful cacophony and hullabaloo. But this was once upon a time. Since the war began, and as the war goes on, it is not difficult to avoid noise: merely impossible.

But afterwards—that afterwards which from the vantage of here and now looks so magical, so elusive—a thirst for silence will no more be jeered at as fussy and over-fastidious. Afterwards and at last, the two sides, inside and outside the squares, will be swept into an understanding that needs no energetic tolerance nor forced efforts of imagination. For at last, from suffering together the great artilleries of noise from sea and air and land, they will ache with equal passion for that gentle hour to come when they can lie upon grass and forget intolerable pandemonium; and, forgetting, forgive it.

It may be, then, without going back to spear-shaped embargoes, that privilege can happen simply and naturally by all desiring it. For we who have seen railings splendidly turned into battleships might find it faintly silly to see battleships demurely turned back into railings.

Prune the railings, that will always be my greatest difficulty. Whoever said, "One thing leads to another," sure spoke a mouthful. At this juncture, for instance, I might so easily do a Mary Rose: wander back into my childhood and never return again. Or I might follow up those hundred thousand presents to see where they led. Directly I make notes—though I must make notes, and cannot stop making notes, and make

notes where I should not, as a cuckoo lays eggs—directly I start making them, they begin to split and multiply. I was elated, however, while reading Samuel Butler’s “Note-Books”—which I frequently do, for (excepting an omnibus volume of Jane Austen’s six further novels which she would have written had she lived another twenty years and only then have reached the reasonable age of sixty-one) I am aware of no better desert-island solace—I was elated to find, I say again, that Butler suffered from much the same temptation to split hairs and multiply notes. He complained:

“My notes always grow longer if I shorten them. I mean the process of compression makes them more pregnant and they breed new notes. I never try to lengthen them, so I do not know whether they would grow shorter if I did. Perhaps that might be a good way of getting them shorter.”

By this time, which was no longer autumn, 1939, but spring, 1940, I had stopped re-reading “Monogram” (a relief, I am sure, to all of us). Instead, I sat making these motley notes on horses and Hollywood, Samuel Butler and “Whistler’s Mother” and “Marie Antoinette,” sitting in a pleasant place a little way up the road from where I lived in Brambleford. Here on a triangle of grass—whence a chalky path runs white up on to the Downs and the lane opposite curls down to Nottyngham Fee—a bench had been put up in 1902, shaded by a clump of tall elms; nobody knew what it commemorated, for the only inscription was a passionate “Do not stand on this bench” painted across the back rail; there must have been talk at some period of bringing the procession of the Lord Mayor’s Show down to Brambleford, otherwise I cannot give any reason why even the most obstreperous small boy should wish to stand on that bench. It was, however, a good place to sit, with your feet among the drifts of pinky pods like crumpled tissue paper, while you stared up through

the high feathery treetops at the fragments of sky between the leaves till you felt entranced as though you were dreaming upwards into blue water fathoms deep. It was little good, however, sentimentalising about drowsy peace while the light pods still drifted down on a lighter breeze, when Nottyngham Fee stone, an ancient chunk thrust into the wall of a cottage less than a hundred yards away, was put there to commemorate the date they virtuously ceased making human sacrifices on this stone; and when, sitting beside me, Sister M. pulled out her writing-case to write to her husband fighting in France. I had been ill during that long cold winter between autumn, 1939, and spring, 1940, and still had to have a nurse with me. Not, Heaven knows, that that was any sort of penance, for she was salt of the earth, a woman who exists to reassure you that there is kindness and strength still in the world, and serenity and shrewd humour and apple good looks and steady, unpretentious, unsensational belief in the ways of Heaven with a mortal. Yes, I had been lucky in my nurses during that infernally inconvenient illness. Idly I watched her, for making irrelevant notes for an irrelevant volume on irrelevant matters invariably leads to idleness and the picking-up of unconsidered trifles. It is curious, while your mind is engaged on a book, how everything that happens, big and small, seems predestined to find a place in it. Which may mean that such a book goes on all the time in every life, whether it gets written or not; and that, if I use the adjective "irrelevant," I am simply behaving as we do when someone says, "What a pretty dress you're wearing!" which leads us to deny it with a bogus shrug of bogus modesty: "Oh, I don't know, it's just a cheap little rag I've had for years." For the amazing relevance of every incident, thought, object and memory which happens to crop up within ten minutes or a lifetime is just what I am concerned to prove. For herein may lie a contribu-

tion to the kingdom of truth and happiness. (We aren't here to be happy. You're telling *me*. And yet—and yet—)

Sister's leather writing-case, for instance (that humming in the air again), which opened along three sides with a zip. It reminded me that I possess just such a case myself, at home in London, a present from H. G. Wells. He gave it to me on Christmas morning, sitting on the terrace of a villa in the South of France. The sun shone hotly on golden orange-trees formally lined up on the grassy terraces rising behind him. No man could wish for a better setting, while he explained passionately that he was *not* giving me a Christmas present: he did not mind giving *presents* but not Christmas presents—did I understand that fully? I would find the case useful for working out-of-doors, yiss (H. G.'s little purring “yiss” was very characteristic and lovable), and he would have my initials put on, GBS, yiss. But never let it be said that he had given me a *Christmas* present (on Christmas morning).

That was the loveliest Christmas.

I scribbled down this coincidence of Sister's writing-case and mine, on a small jotter I carried in my handbag. A friend staying with me a few weeks before had received it as an advertisement for a certain excellent brand of letter-paper, and she had handed it on to me. Then I noticed for the first time that on the back of it was a slogan vaunting the paper's claims—and I felt a slight tremor of power, for the slogan was one which I had chosen myself when asked to act as judge in a competition set by the same firm. Instantly my mind slid back again to the beloved South of France, only further along the coast towards Toulon; for I remembered choosing the slogan in a high wind on the hotel terrace at Le Lavandou; it was not the stately beautiful style of stone terrace of that Christmas morning when I acquired the writing-case, but the homelier kind where the eucalyptus trees are a little ragged,

and the sand of the beach and the shiny tough grasses meet and mingle, and you sit in your fourth-best bathing-suit (which is your worst, counting from the other end), a precariously poised striped umbrella in a stand above your head, and order an *apéritif* at any hour of the day or night. And it was not Christmas but May—the same month, perhaps the same day as now in the spring of 1940—sitting on the bench under the elms, Sister M. writing to her husband in France, while I scribbled a note about coincidences on the little jotter which happened accidentally to carry on its back the slogan I myself had chosen.

That is how the pattern goes all the time, like music by Bach, endlessly weaving, if we have inclination to halt and listen and connect. But for me, that slogan would not have been there. And finding it there, at that moment and in that way, gratified, on a Lilliputian scale, my love of any personal assurance that I really do exist. The publication of a quantity of novels has never given me such assurance; even when I get the figures of those that have sold best, my reactions still remain wooden to the fact that they must mean a few people have read the book. But when a manicurist whom I had never seen before, in a shop where I had never gone before, gave my name in a babble of enthusiasm as the author of her favourite books, I got my thrill then; I knew she did not say it after secret recognition, because when, as they say in detective novels, "I turned back the lapel of my coat and disclosed my identity," her scarlet confusion proved her sincere, as she dropped my hand and most of her implements in all the misery of having also dropped a bad brick (so she thought).

And I felt the same exaggerated pleasure when a cat-that-walks-by-himself type of young man, with whom I had had a cheerful but impersonal house-party-and-restaurant friendship, suddenly rang me up and asked if he might come round

and talk to me because he was unhappy and in a mess. I could do nothing about the mess, he said; but it just happened, he said, that I was the one person to whom he felt he *could* talk in this particular crisis. Ever since then, though I often see him at restaurants and house parties, we have never alluded to that spontaneous and surprising visit; probably he never knew what a disproportionate pleasure I drew from it, simply because out of his hundred more intimate friends he had chosen me personally, instead of trying to get over his black hour by sitting down with one of my books (after trying Shakespeare and Montaigne and all that), and had written to me afterwards to tell me so. No, definitely and heartily I should always wish to be appreciated for me first, the living me, as full of faults as an egg is full of meat (which I have always thought a bad simile, Shakespeare or no Shakespeare), rather than for the result of what is, after all, no more and no less than my job, to which I am compelled by instinctive law to give no less than my utmost effort, reward or no reward. What fun it is to be powerful if not for too long—not longer, let us say, than for the hour it took to choose a slogan, for the hour in which one judged and awarded (oh, how graciously) the recitation prize at one's old school! (Do you *really* think she's the best, Head Mistress? I'm afraid I must disagree with you; I think she's the worst. Her gestures are so stereotyped, don't you think? Oh, no! I forgot, you don't. The one I'm going to choose in a few moments, when the last three out of the forty-nine have recited "To a Skylark," will knock you silly with sheer surprise; but it's for me to say, because you gave me the power.)

But I never enjoyed quite such a mad, splendid thirty minutes of personal power as when I was invited to a studio projection room to see a film run through for my especial benefit, because I had collaborated with fourteen other people in the

original version which was not used; the producer who had arranged this run-through was called away; he left me alone in one of those luxurious roomy armchairs, softly padded, that you only find in film projection rooms, as though film executives were so tender-skinned and soft of bone that they had to be specially catered for, and a few minutes spent on either the chair made out of Cetewayo's hide or the kitchen chair painted by the genius Van Gogh would have been the death of them.

"How long is it going to take?" I first asked him. "Because I've only just an hour to spare."

This was not swank, it happened to be true; but he looked at me at once with increased respect; apparently it goes over big when you have only an hour to spare out of threescore years and ten.

"Only an hour?" he repeated. "Well, the film takes two and a half hours, but you'll probably want chiefly to see Miss So-and-so's scenes" (and that's where you're wrong, my friend). "See here, I'll fix it up that whenever you want to skip a sequence you can press this button." And he fixed it up, and left me to it.

Can you imagine the intoxication of arrogance that then took possession of me? The invisible operator began to throw the film on the screen, and I, the god, I began to press the button. I pressed it more and more ruthlessly, cutting off Miss So-and-so in her cavortings; I rushed through scenes in which Miss So-and-so figured; I rushed through other scenes, tossing them all together hurly-burly; if I lingered at all, it was only for the more subtle gratification of knowing that in a second I could press that button again.

Presently I came out again into the cool air, and sauntered smiling down the street. I had seen the whole of that two-and-a-half-hour spectacle (magnificent, grandiose, unique,

mediocre, by the ascending adjectival scale of a certain Hollywood producer) in exactly twenty-three minutes. There is a divinity which ends our shapes, and that divinity for once was me.

In the spring, a year ago, I was wandering with a friend in Savernake Forest. I cannot tell how early or how late in the spring, for the season had poured down rain and sun in absent-minded fashion, so that some of the flowers had been dilatory in appearing and others had hastened along sooner than was reasonable though not too soon for welcome. Therefore on that glorious morning wood-anemones and primroses and violets and the first bluebells all were out together, conquering the green moss; the branches of the trees, not yet impenetrable with foliage, allowed the sun to pass through and slide softly down the tree-trunks into pools and puddles of golden light. I cannot remember that any birds were singing; my impression was that this delectable wood lay around us in clear silence. My companion remarked that it gave her a lovely slippery feeling of something not beyond but beside its own beauty, as though the whole scene were about to vanish at any moment; and I exclaimed, led by her remark to sudden discovery: “Of course. It’s Act III, Scene V. It’s another part of the forest.”

The Forest of Arden. Enter Rosalind, Celia and Touchstone. “Well, this is the Forest of Arden.” But Shakespeare, they say, had been thinking less of the Ardennes than of the woods at Shottery; and here now was the Forest of Savernake—though it might equally well have been the woods near Beaulieu Abbey or Sherwood Forest haunted by Robin Hood and his men. Forests have all this same haunting magic when the sun stripes the tree-trunks, and white and blue violets are out at the same time as primroses and windflowers.

The curtain falls. And when it goes up again, a tree-trunk has been moved from one side of the stage to the other; and this is enough for us to believe that we have wandered miles, though we are looking at the same vernal sunshine swaying on the leaves and the same tender pattern of small colored flowers.

"As You Like It" has for me always held enchantment more than any other of Shakespeare's pastoral plays. I have seen two Rosalinds approach between the trees, laughing, swaggering a little, glad to be free of the formal French court, gladder still not to be free any more but fathoms deep in love. I have seen more than two, of course; but these I will remember, for one was a schoolgirl called Dorothy, the youngest, freshest, most vernal Rosalind that ever chose to wear scarlet doublet and hose instead of her customary green and russet-brown.

The second Rosalind whom I shall always remember was not a schoolgirl. She also did not wear the conventional green and russet, but the blue satin costume of a tall slender boy from a Watteau picture, "L'Indifférent" perhaps, who was stolen from the Louvre and put back again (one of those perplexing little incidents that hurt nobody, except, of course, the nervous system of the custodian who might have first discovered the loss). "L'Indifférent," poor lad, would be hard put to it to be indifferent in these different days. Yet this production of which I speak was an eighteenth century French court and an eighteenth century Arden, and Edith Evans was this tall beautiful princess, dressed as a boy seeking her de-throned father; and there again was all the witchery of Dorothy's youth and freshness and laughter, though this time it was achieved by the genius of a great actress.

It is strange Shakespeare should write more powerfully about love in his comedies than in his tragedies. For Ophelia

and Desdemona were the innocent sopranos of love, and Rosalind and Viola, Beatrice and Imogen, the contraltos.

Not in Arden nor in Savernake, nor in any other part of any forest, but seated on that 1902 bench under the elms (you will remember that I was forbidden to stand upon it), pondering still upon “Monogram,” I realised that only an hour after I had written “The End” to that volume of random autobiography, I could have begun again from another part of the forest. I had only to move a tree-trunk.

Down here in Brambleford, where I came because of the war, I work under the walnut-tree at the bottom of the garden, weather permitting: that lost weather which was once so proudly a feature in the news, “A depression is hurrying towards us from Iceland” and so forth, but which now arrives unannounced, saying, as it were: “I thought I’d drop in and take pot-luck.” Just beyond the wooden fence is a strayed horse who walks up and down uttering loud whinnies of desolation and bewilderment. She, too, belongs in the chump category; for every evening her owners come and fetch her with a halter and friendly remarks such as “Now, old girl, at it again,” in the most savoury Berkshire, with further comments on her foolishness, which lead me to believe that her pasturage is high on the slopes of the downs, and that every day she squeezes through a hole in the hedge and cannot squeeze back again, which accounts for her despondent truancy; which I also suspect is somehow connected with the flapper horse in a clover field near by; the one with a long straight fair mane worn dropped from a parting on either side in the early Greta Garbo style.

I like to keep in touch with the horse world; and to hear her eloquent hoofs, as many like to hear the pattering feet of

children while they work. I have always had a wistful conviction, moreover, that, put me on horseback, I should ride like the very devil, with everyone remarking on my splendid seat in the saddle: a conviction which has never had a chance to round on me with loud mocking whinnies of contradiction.

In the unexpurgated edition of "Gulliver's Travels" which enthralled me from about my seventh year, it surprises me that I always skipped that unpronounceable bit (unpronounceable beyond even what, shirking; I used to call the Brob bit) where wild horses functioned as men. I suppose the more orthodox side of me was already declaring that there was a proper place for everything, and that the horse should not sit in parliament but had better continue as the faithful friend of man, under him, literally and metaphorically.

When I went to Munich, a city of beauty then with no sinister associations, I longed to buy Franz Marc's picture of little red horses prancing on an open heath; and his "Pyramid of Blue Horses," stranger and less natural, for certainly one does not often see horses in a pyramid and blue to boot; but no one could deny its azure, equine charm. Franz Marc was killed in what now we cannot help calling the old war, instead of the Great War. A generous friend gave me a reproduction of his little red horses, vital cheeky little animals, who, in their turn, gave their name to one of my books. Directly I published it with this title, friends began to send me horses as mascots, a whole cavalcade, so that I became a collector without the slightest intention that this should happen. I meant to collect walking-sticks, assuming that a "collection" starts when you have one of something you don't use, and then another adds itself and you exclaim, "Hullo, two!" The third arrival marks the boundary, unless you make a firm stand (as I did over fans: I would *not* start a collection of old fans). Once over the boundary, you are lost. My first horse,

an Arrangement in Black and Scarlet, was accompanied by a card from the giver on which was enigmatically scrawled: “Dear Charles, you will find this useful when you go to Constantinople.” It took a great deal of Lord Peter Wimsey and Monsieur Poirot before I discovered that she had sent another friend a passport wallet at the same time, both from the same Fortnum & Mason. The next horse to arrive was mad and modern, with a curly mop and a leer and a look of Harpo Marx. (Harpo in a film, let it be understood. Harpo in real life is a smooth-headed little angel who gave me a signed gramophone record of a harp solo composed and played by himself, with the startling title “Aphrodisiac” announced in clear bell-like tones just before the innocent, crystalline music begins to ripple on the air.) It also unsoberly resembled my idea of the horse named Roland down whose throat the burghers of Aix poured “their last measure of wine” after he had brought the good news from Ghent. I always felt it was unwise of the burghers; a spaniel of mine once got at the Chianti flask, in Italy, and subsequently spent the whole evening trying to rub off his other head against the tiled floor.

A different Roland, Roland Young, slipped a charming little blown-glass horse inside my table-napkin, the second time I dined with him in Hollywood, because he said he became uneasy at the way I had kept looking at his Ming horse the first time.

Then I did the unforgivable thing, if I had sincerely wanted to limit my collection: I bought a horse. I bought it in San Francisco at Gump’s, famous for its jade. The manager at Gump’s had been showing me jade by the hour, lifting out and lingeringly unwrapping exquisite pieces from locked boxes inside the small safe inside the big safe in a locked room. Mutton jade, spinach jade, milk jade . . . You might suppose that the different varieties of jade had been chosen by some-

body at lunch in a great hurry. I had not wanted to spend more than a pound, but these treasures each cost several thousand dollars. I could not stop him from unwrapping them because he was enjoying himself too much. You could see that he loved jade. One small, moon-coloured bowl, so delicate, so transparent, so perfect, was only the cost of living for a year; for one lunatic moment I wondered if I should buy it, and so not live for a year, but use it as a begging-bowl, squatting perhaps in the middle of Sunset Boulevard, or just outside Grauman's Chinese picture palace. No year of normal living, cracked and full of flaws as it is bound to be, could ever approach the breathless perfection of that bowl. If a flash of truth could ever be made concrete, this, surely, was how it would look. When I came round again from my moment of tranced insanity, I hastily seized a small Chinese pottery horse, paid a fairly modest sum, gasped my thanks to the manager, who did not listen for he was unwrapping more jade, and rushed out into the street. I am glad now that I did not buy the bowl; for whereas the desire for truth is worth any sacrifice, the desire to possess an object of art which symbolises truth is unbalanced self-indulgence not to be excused by any highfaluting drivel; you would have to keep it in the bank where you would never see it; or you would handle it lovingly every day, and drop it the following Wednesday.

But here in this village of Brambleford in a fold of the downs, where, because of the war, I spent autumn of 1939 and came back in the spring of 1940, horses group themselves perpetually on the plain sky line (most of us wish our sky lines to be plain, and to have horses standing on them, though cows would do at a pinch). The very hotel where I am staying has turned its loose-boxes into bedrooms, which answers far better than if one tried to turn bedrooms into loose-boxes. Though I received a grave shock, after I had been here for

about six months, when I happened to catch sight of a *real* horse gazing at me from its loose-box window. One gets used to a world turned topsy-turvy, so that any brief resumption of a world turned back turvy-topsy again cannot yet be faced with normal equanimity. There are famous racing-stables not far away; and a procession of horses, ridden by spry and springy stable-boys, files under my window every morning, making a pleasant *clip-clop* on the country road in the constant fine weather. Once, they passed just as the wireless was giving instructions about parachutes and parachute invasion, and I thought of the wooden horse packed with soldiers that was pushed into Troy. At this point it is perhaps salutary to remember that when war broke out I rang up a dear old lady who I knew had been mightily bothered in her mind ever since the crisis of the year before, and asked her, in somewhat tentative tones, how she was feeling? “Well, dear, do you know, I feel better. I simply said to myself: Well, it’s out of my hands now.”

When I first arrived in the spring, after a winter of dangerous illness in a nursing-home (a ridiculous, futile and expensive way to spend any winter between an autumn and spring of war), a friend presented me with a second wineglass. The first, she had sent me in January, and it arrived to cheer me at a very black hour; its shape was harmonious, and it had my initials on it, and it was good to receive anything so clearly marked as my own when I was drinking nothing but orange-juice, and had almost forgotten all the joyous associations that collect round a wineglass during more bacchanalian years. I was told, moreover, that there was a third which would be given me when peace was declared. “Or would you rather have it now?” she asked quickly, because she was one of those rare generous people to whom keeping back a present, even for future celebration, did not come naturally; but I would

not let her give me the other wineglass which she had meant to keep until the world was at peace, because I was afraid that, until then, it might bring bad luck. I am not in the very least superstitious, but still I thought it might bring bad luck. She said she had bought them years ago at Ghent, the very place whence the good news came which earned Roland-the-Horse his orgy at Aix. Apparently it has never been established exactly what was this Good News, so I shall link up time and fact, poetry and fantasy, with a great wish that the good news is still to come, and that when the world hears it at last I shall be given my third wineglass, into which shall be poured my last measure of wine from the bottle of Château-neuf du Pape given me for my fiftieth birthday on June 17th, the day we heard the bad news from France.

To work reposefully under the walnut-tree every day, surrounded by hundreds of papers and rough notes and odd sheets of manuscript, I must have plenty of paperweights, unless I want to rush after the whole of this book as it flutters away on the wind to the sky-line top of the Downs, where it may be eaten by horses and, no doubt, spewed out again. I had about four paperweights already; not nearly enough. Two I had acquired by the simple means of saying wistfully, "I wish I had two more paperweights," in front of two generous friends at Brighton in April; and they forthwith went out on a paperweight chase and found a couple which they deemed suitable, neat but not gaudy; one in the shape of a glass light-house and filled with different-coloured sands from the Isle of Wight, especially acceptable because it reminded me of how we used to bring home sand in our plimsolls every year from Broadstairs, when I was a child, and how our hearts contracted with poignant sorrow as Nurse shook it out on the bathroom floor when the summer holidays were over. I have,

let it be said, a positive genius for nostalgia, and almost anything, even a paperweight, can start me off in a moment. The other was a view, under a circle of glass, of the Crystal Palace, and this too pleased me by association; for a Russian artist, who had painted my portrait and deserted me to go to Hollywood and paint Charlie Chaplin's portrait (can you blame him?) once gave me a present of a walking-stick inset with one of those little peepholes, fashionable in Victorian days, especially in penholders; when you looked through it, if you were pure in heart, you saw a view of the Crystal Palace. It was a nice enough stick when he gave it to me; but by odd coincidence its value increased prodigiously five days later, when the Crystal Palace happened to burn itself down.

A heavy glass oblong paperweight, windowing a pleasing painting of a Victorian nosegay with a butterfly poised on the top of a sweet-william, is at present sedately keeping down to grass a rough note which says:

Sentimentality: e.g. 2 sorts of road menders: old and new. One was bound in limp suède, other used the road-drill. If possible. Machinery. “Eroica.” “Everybody ought to have at least one story against themselves.” Also posting letters in potpourri jars.

Yes, dear, yes. We'll go into all that presently.

The most attractive of all my paperweights I cannot use, because it is a genuine antique of the Victorian snowstorm period; and when the yellowing snow is shaken into a swirl inside its glass bowl, the little red house behind the little old man and the little old woman breaks from its moorings and swirls as well; that is too pitiful a sight; we simply cannot have our houses swirling loose in snowstorms. John van Druten gave me this, last time we were both in Brighton together. Carefully, then, he told me some bad news. What an understandable desire of Cleopatra's: to pickle in brine the

messengers who brought bad news, even though first they placed a snowstorm paperweight between her hands! The bad news turned out not to be true then, though it came true two years later, when the house in the glass ball had already drifted away from its foundations. All this proves something, though I am not sure what; perhaps merely that I should have enjoyed the gift at the time without worrying about the news.

I have always loved Brighton; so did Mother and Father; we went down there for several months after the Vaal River diamond smash which compelled us to give up our house in Holland Park. This was my first Christmas away from home, and I thought I should hate it. On the contrary, I was enchanted with the hotel and its merry programme of gym-khanas, fancy-dress balls, cotillions and so forth. Better than home and Holland Park? Why, it was better than Christmas at Buckingham Palace would have been, according to my standards, which at that age (fourteen) were cheaper and more florid than I think they ever were before and, I hope, since. A turquoise-blue satin dress cut square at the neck, my hair in a free shining mane instead of in plaits, and I realised, looking in the mirror, flushed and excited, that it was temporarily true, what the boy friend waiting at the foot of the stairs exclaimed directly he saw me: "I say, you're jolly pretty, you know. I say, you're not cross with me for saying so, are you? I say, are you going to give me what I asked you for last night and you said perhaps tonight? Because if you don't I'll be jolly cross when you're looking as pretty as this. I say, you know, your hair, you know. I bet Roger'll want to dance with you tonight when he sees how jolly pretty you're looking, even though he said you weren't as pretty as Dorothy last night, and I said you were. I do think after that, you ought to give me you-know-what you wouldn't promise."

You-know-what was what Wendy woodlesomely called a Thimble.

When I last heard from Rollo, thirty-four years ago, he was in Ceylon, tea-planting; and I was at a finishing school at Wiesbaden when I received his letter suggesting that I should join him as soon as I felt like marriage, and better and brighter thimbles.

Next time I went to Brighton I was less cheap and gaudy, but more inclined to long silences, long expeditions by myself in Volk's railway along the edge of the sea to Black Rock, and a walk up into the Kipling country, the "Puck of Pook's Hill" country, towards Rottingdean; enjoying in more or less equal parts the smell of wild thyme, the peppermint bull's-eyes in my pocket, and the usual reveries of seventeen; more inclined to hunch my shoulders, to present an obstinate left shoulder and an impatient "Oh, nothing!" to Mother's anxious enquiries as to what I had been doing all day; more inclined to read Victoria Cross secretly, lying on the shingle in the cool cave shadow under the West Pier. "Life's Shop Window," I read then. "So this is real life," I murmured. But perhaps it was further removed from real life than even Rollo's conversation three years before. We stayed at a little hotel called The Hollywood. It is still there. At that period Hollywood must have blandly meant the wood of holly trees. The whole is greater than the part, Euclid tells us, so now "Hollywood" summons up a picture very different from the sea-front at Brighton. In fact, it does not call up Hollywood at all, but my house and garden ("Spanish style") which I rented at Santa Monica, while I worked for the studios during the spring of 1933, the spring of the Los Angeles earthquake.

Staying at The Hollywood in Brighton was a Swedish boy,

tall, slim, fair, blue-eyed and beautiful, called Gustav; his surname was, I believe, the Swedish for guinea-fowl which we had for dinner last night with a bottle of irresistible Alsatian wine. Gustav's father owned great timber forests in North Sweden; and Gustav, Rollo's successor, used to draw frequent pictures, in his wooing of blended chivalry and idiocy, that one day he would be felling trees and would look up and, no doubt by the light of the aurora borealis, see me coming towards him through the snow seasonably dressed in white satin. But that never happened either, any more than Rollo and Ceylon, for Gustav bored me, as any maiden would have been bored if she toiled seven years for Lancelot and got Galahad. "Life's Shop Window" . . . Like the poet who wrote "Cynara," at that moment I called for madder music and stronger wine.

Later, on my frequent visits to Brighton, I learned to love it for its little Regency squares with their green-shaded iron balconies, for the curve and sweep of the line of houses to the left and to the right when you stand at the end of the pier looking shoreward, and they melt into soft blue haze. And, where I stand, a placard on the left announces: "Madame Casseopia can be found now on the other side of the pier." Enchanted by this, I at once investigated the other side of the pier, where no placards were to be found except "Speedboats for adults 2/-." The sea-gulls gave shrill screams of mourning and dismay as they wheeled and swooped round my head. Madame Casseopia was lost. She was an adult; she had paid her two shillings; she had put out to sea in a pea-green boat; the whole has a flavour of Lear (Edward, not King). Anyhow, she was back at her booth the next day.

Yet it seems unpardonable that I should not have mentioned sooner my earliest seaside happiness connected with goat-carriages. A ride in a goat-carriage comes nearer the fan-

tastic joy of being drawn by galloping unicorns than any streamline car or rushing aeroplane. Even now, at Brighton or Broadstairs, when I see a goat-carriage, a wistful yearning sweeps over me, till I remember that all is not as it was in the days when they were legitimate equipage. Their mad attraction resembles my secret desire—at about the goat-carriage age—for someone to give me a nest of tables, three or even four, one slid inside another. There were none in our own home, so I must have seen them in some other lady’s superior drawing-room. I told myself that I could be happy, *really* happy, happy for *always*, if I only were given a nest of tables (and that, my girl, is where you were wrong).

Nobody can deny that goats have charm; like zebras and dragons and donkeys, they have the slightly absurd air of animals escaped from legend. I stayed with a man in Essex who had a white nanny-goat with two white kids. We used to wander round the yellow buttercup fields, and this pair of enchanting creatures followed us, skipping and playing till one could have cried at their beauty. Yesterday evening in Brambleford I saw as pretty a sight: a donkey intoxicated with *joie de vivre* tearing round and round and up and down in a cherry orchard under the moon, though not by moonlight because it was only half an hour after sunset; ripe red cherries twinkled and swung from every branch; tomorrow they would all be picked. Perhaps the donkey in the cherry orchard had gone Russian; he was fey; he was berserk; he was the Donkey of Donkeys; and I should fight any man, woman or child who did not agree with me that he was an amazingly graceful donkey. Each time his circus gallop brought him close, with elegant coquetry he swerved away again, his hoofs spurning the ground. Yes, here, not in a nest of tables, but here and now, was happiness.

Whenever the careless idiom is used, “You get my goat,” I

have always determined that no one shall get *my* goat. Not if it was ever so. My goat, existing symbolically, is a lovely creature, snow-white, swift and graceful; harnessed lightly to a goat-carriage from Brighton or Broadstairs, he flies up Mount Parnassus, up Mount Olympus, Mount Ida, Popocatepetl, Monte Cristallo, Dunkery Beacon . . . My weight makes no difference to his pace, because directly I become part of a symbolic goat act, I have no weight. My goat browses on white violets, and butts no one except my enemies, and then only in mockery and not to hurt.

But my goat in actual existence is a dressing-gown, a birthday present from Romney Brent, that irresistible Mexican-Basque actor who delighted us in "Three Men on a Horse." He was staying with me in a small but fascinating villa on the Mediterranean (that was a lovely summer, when the word "Mediterranean" still meant slipping your body out of the heat into its green coolness; only that and nothing more). The dressing-gown was bought at Cannes, and was a delicate silver-grey in a material new to me, thin and silky yet not as thin as silk. They told Romney that it was woven from the hair of goat. No wonder that I wear it constantly and with undiminished affection. Goats, donkeys, zebras, unicorns, tortoises, toads, lizards and penguins, they all have that fabulous, half-comical charm. It cannot only lie in their fleetness, for I have included the tortoise and excluded the ostrich; nor their grace, for I have excluded most pointedly the swan. The strong beat of wings when the swans fly up the river at dawn is a glorious and a terrifying rhythm; and the sight of a swan trailing his stately river reflection against a dark background of foliage is perfectly desirable provided it comes no nearer; but stare into a swan's face, and you see nothing but greed and cruelty. I have often wondered why you fling him cake. Keep your cake for the thrushes hopping on the lawn; or, if you like

cake, keep it for yourself; but gulls and swans need no encouragement; they are the perpetual survivors.

Every summer holidays when I was a child, we were sent to Broadstairs with our nurse, while Mother and Father went to some mysterious region known as the Engadine. I did not ride in goat-carriages there, because Florrie, our nurse, did not trust goats. A year later, after Florrie had married and gone away, I bore a letter with pride into my mother's charming bedroom of vieux rose and Watteau blue. I think this happened to be the first time I had ever brought the letters; usually by the time I trotted in to receive a kiss and a strip of Mother's toast and marmalade, she had already received her post. A pity that I carried it just this once, because Florrie wrote to say that she had smallpox, and that her husband had just died of it, and would mother please send a pound . . . I thought they would never stop disinfecting me that morning; all over, too, not just my hands that had pawed the envelope.

Broadstairs was a yearly paradise. We always joined with two other families, each of two little girls. Making six. It never occurred to me that people who lived in London went away at any other time than between July and September. Uncle Mac and his niggers sang on the sands. When I went down for Whitsun, three years ago, the authentic Uncle Mac was still there with his banjo and his encouraging quips to the kiddies to sing up. I could have sung him any of his choruses of forty-three years ago; but one or two adult inhibitions kept me silent, though still deeply and sentimentally attached to that chocolate-coloured face with its enormous slab of painted pink mouth. Broadstairs also meant the kingdom of shells, among the rocks at low tide, shells pearl and pink and purple, flawless in form and tiny as tropical butterflies and fish; it meant lumps of chalk twinkling on the powdery sands

through the sunlit rock archway at the foot of a flight of rocky steps, dark and uneven and smelling of seaweed, that plunged adventurously downward from the parade right through the cliff. It was because one or other of us nearly always slipped down those steps, that we were not allowed iron spades. We were also not allowed to take off our shoes and stockings or bathe for the first three days, an inexorable rule, and probably a very silly one. Those stairs are gone now, and the way down to the sands is frank and open and concrete. I suppose it is all for the best. At the Bleak House end of the little bay was the inn and a rough jetty and a lifeboat shed, and a couple of figureheads against the tarred wall—one, I think, a Highlander of the Waterloo period. A steep cobbled path led up the cliff, winding coyly past a house called "Cosy Nook" which I thought the most beautiful name a house could have, and mentally adopted for my own future habitation; then, with a dark thrill, it ran past Bleak House—or we ran past it, for our nurses declared it was haunted. Dickens had lived there, we were told; but Dickens meant nothing to me till I was about thirteen, when for four or five years he meant everything. So it was only when I returned to Broadstairs on that sentimental pilgrimage at Whitsun, that I noticed the little Victorian house facing the sea, with its strip of garden in front, where Aunt Betsey Trotwood had lived: "David, donkeys!" I noticed also that "Cosy Nook" was now austere "The Nook," and would like to assure the owners that I quite see their point. Sitting in the garden of the Albion Hotel where Father and Mother had always stayed when, restored by that Engadine place, they came down to see their offspring towards the end of the holidays, I overheard a dialogue just beyond the hedge: "It's not that I *mind* if the Germans bomb Broadstairs and my shop," said one woman earnestly to another, "but it's so bad for *commerce*. That's

where it's going to matter: commerce." A well-balanced courageous woman; I liked her very much.

When I was about eight I experienced my first Channel crossing. Mother and Father plumped for Blankenberghe that year (I don't know what their Engadine had done). Chiefly I remember a little monkey-man perched on a rail at Ostend and staring absorbed at the spectacle of bathing-belles. He used opera-glasses. Mother said: "Don't look." But of course I looked, recognising him as the father of one of Mother's protégées, Violet, a thin, pretty lady who sang in a soprano voice. I worshipped her, but when she asked me to be her bridesmaid, I wriggled and shyly refused. After the wedding I heard Florrie and the cook talking in some excitement about how she had fainted going up the aisle, which I thought deeply romantic. (When the fair, pale young conjurer had fainted across the platform, at a concert party in Broadstairs, I thought that romantic, too, and badly wanted him to do it again.) A year or two later, Violet's marriage went astray through her husband's bad behaviour and Chorus said: "She couldn't give 'im 'is children, that was what it was." A perplexing summary. I did not see my idol again for over forty years, nor did I hear news of her. But when I lectured in London two years ago, she rushed up to me afterwards, crying girlishly: "I'm Violet. Don't you know me? *Violet*." Apparently she had married another husband and given *him* his children . . . I decided to say nothing of the conversation overheard between Florrie and Cook over forty years ago, but instead referred to her beautiful soprano voice; a compliment which went over big.

Of Blankenberghe I remember little except that August 18th was Mother's birthday, and I chose for her, using my own taste and judgment, quite the most breathlessly beautiful object I had ever seen: a box made entirely of shells, shiny

with varnish. I expected Mother would swoon with joy when I gave it to her. She did certainly feign excitement and gratitude, and I received many kisses; but before we went back to England she changed the large square abomination made entirely of shells, for a small unostentatious photograph frame made of mauve enamel pansies twisted together. I was sorely hurt, but even more than hurt, I was incredulous. How *could* she? How could she bear to part with the shell box? How could any mother in her senses prefer a small dull photograph-frame?

Mother did not usually show such lack of imagination. When I, with my cousins, used to arrange plays in the nursery, and she was invited to come up and form the audience, she solemnly used to put on long white kid gloves, carry a lorgnon, and pin an artificial flower in her hair to do honour to the occasion and create an atmosphere as of the stalls at His Majesty's or the Haymarket. That was delightful. But again, lacking imagination, Mother saw no reason why we should not wear out our last year's Sunday dresses at school, and could not understand when we passionately argued that they were *all wrong*. Schoolgirls were out of her range. She was very sweet and very pretty, and therefore spoilt by her three brothers, and by Father, and by all the gentlemen who had admired her and given her presents; and she was as gay, as infatuated with pleasure as only a little Viennese could be, though the whole family had left Vienna and been brought to London when she was only thirteen; and because she was not in the least sentimental, she never returned to visit Vienna from that day until the day she died last July, when she was eighty. It is certainly not from Mother that I inherit my inconvenient nostalgia for old familiar places. Indeed, it was part of her personality that the past meant to her nothing whatever; nor the future beyond what was written in her en-

gagement-book for the following fortnight. Except during Father's illness before his death, an illness which lasted three years, she followed pleasure: not feverish pleasures, but parties, popularity; pleasures that meant pretty clothes and nice people, the opera, Ranelagh, the theatrical garden-party, a game of bridge, a drive in a friend's car to have tea at the Croydon Aerodome, the opening day of a picture show. She was seventy-seven, seventy-eight, seventy-nine, but still her zest for pleasure never flagged. It was amusing and a little touching to hear her tell us of her social sociable career from week to week, with never the slightest indication that she was aware of herself as a very old lady. Though she never used make-up or dyed her hair, her pink cheeks were naturally pink, and I could hardly remember when her pretty silver curls were dark. She was impenitently extravagant, and had a wonderful, if unconscious, technique which enabled her to shed all responsibility and let the other fellow worry.

Father loved sculling on the river, and taught me to love it too; so in the summer months we often took a house at Maidenhead or Taplow, and he hired a handsome double skiff for the season. This meant that Mother had to handle the steering-ropes, a responsibility which she took much too frivolously, or often did not take at all, quite unconcerned at our scowls and rage while she waved gaily to a friend on shore, and we meanwhile crashed into the bank, or, in spite of all our efforts, lay broadside across the lock just as the gates were parted and the lock-keeper's shouts involved us in open shame. . . . But it was no good being public-school with Mother. When I was seven and had written a play which involved a king being turned into a tree, it was Mother's responsibility to switch off the lights to give the king a chance to skip off the stage and be replaced by a palm in a pot. Mother had invited a large audience to see what a talented

little daughter she had; and chatting and delicately bragging, she quite forgot the light. I learnt, as I said, in later years to forgive her for her irresponsibility because of her courage in any crisis, her resilience, her sparkling sense of humour, her tolerant outlook, her love of life; yet I think it is because of Mother that I never quite learnt to forgive it in others; and still less could I forgive others for forgiving it too easily. This attitude of mine towards the get-away-with-murder culprit, pretty and spoilt, was clearly started on Father's behalf. He worked terribly hard and spent nothing on himself, and money worries brought him down at last. He loved Mother so faithfully and so devotedly that he could deny her nothing, except perhaps those six "matinées" of which you shall hear presently.

It was difficult to check Mother at any time, and I am glad she did not live to see the war stalk in and pleasure go out. Of course she was ruthless. These charming little bullies who can command adoration on no sterling qualities, but simply on being alive and vital and ready for the fun, will never lack their slaves. Though it is only from about seventy onwards that I fully appreciated what she was and ceased growling at what she was not; I longed for what a small boy once called a "nannie-mother," comfortable, loving, and yet practical, who would know what to do in any emergency, who could nurse me, bathe me, look after me, lift heavy jugs of water.

Not that Mother failed in perpetual solicitude about my health; only she had no powers to cope with it, so she simply succeeded in calling things "dangerous" and "rough" which I ought to have been encouraged to take in my stride (such as climbing a tree or swimming the Channel) and in making me nervous where it would have been better had I been braced. As against that, I was only taken to the dentist when

I had toothache, and then he could not have been a very good dentist because he always pulled out the tooth. She had a firm little set of rules with a funny little nervous set of reasons for each, which still affect my daily life, such as: “Never drink water unless you know where it comes from” (the trouble I have had, tracing every drop back to an unimpeachable source); “Never lean back in a railway carriage, because how are you to know?” Never eat green sweets; never lock a lavatory door at stations: “I mean, isn’t it, you can always manage with your gloves in the door” (but I could *not* always manage, and my failure to do so led to the most embarrassing complications). Finally: “Never eat water-cress, because, you see, there may be cows!” The bitterness of this final edict only really caught me in the midriff a year before her death, when, having reluctantly refused water-cress always, I came in one day to find Mother enjoying a whole luscious bowl of it for tea with brown bread and butter. When I informed her that water-cress was not healthy because, you see, there may be cows, I received only surprise and derision at my elderly fussiness.

Yes, I wanted a mother who from beginning to end stood for reassurance. But we were always reminded, as children, that Mother was delicate, must be looked after, must not be banged and bumped nor have small hard dirty bodies flung like bullets into her lap. All the other Rakonitz women could make Apfelstrudel; Mother was the only one who could not cook at all. (She loved gardens and did no gardening; I have inherited that.) She was certainly no Martha; on the other hand she was not Mary either, for she would never have listened for long; attention to others was not her outstanding talent. The other Rakonitz women could make clothes for their children and grandchildren, and go round to the butcher themselves, and twinkle in a knowledgeable way as they

meticulously chose the joint to satisfy them. (The way Aunt Elsa bewitched her butcher was nobody's business.) But Mother's household shopping was done by the cook at the area door, and included the purchase of jam, which summed up my childish sense that in my home all was not as it should be; for all my cousins, when I went to tea in their nurseries, had homemade jam, delicious jam made by their mothers who knew the way to the kitchen and whose cooks were never safe from sudden incursion and hearty rebuke. Not that my mother did not adore shopping. The need of it was in her very bones, but it was shopping for adornment, of her rooms, her children or herself—shopping that took her chiefly in a smart hired brougham, to William Whiteley in the Westbourne Grove; she hardly ever walked more than a few paces till she was seventy-seven, when it was suddenly discovered that she could do up to two miles at a spanking pace and enjoy it, and then fight her way onto a bus, dimpling wooingly at the bus-conductor, and hitting her fellow-fighters hard, especially if they were women. For she expected chivalry wherever she went.

Whiteley's monthly accounts were the occasion for a monthly row in the home, where Father used the male privilege of bellowing (often I have wondered whether husbands and fathers still bellow?). He had abundant reason, for Mother's purchases were sweetly oblivious that any pocket had a bottom to it, or that anything that was bought need ever be paid for. As children, if we yelped, "*I want it!*" Florrie-the-nurse used to reply smartly, "Then want must be your master!" But Mother, intoxicated by the allure of Westbourne Grove, never for one minute thought that want must be her master, and would have dismissed the axiom as thoroughly defeatist. I believe now that she had no conscience, but that luckily by nature she was a sweet and affectionate woman

without malice or cruelty; so this lack of a conscience did not matter as vitally as in a woman of less charming disposition. “What do you want with six mattinays?” Father used to bel-
low, smiting his fist down among the ornaments on the writing-table. (There were so many ornaments on the writing-table that no one could ever write on it, so many on the piano that no one could play on it; and the dining-room table was so dressed with what the Elizabethans would call “kickshoes that are delicate” that poor Father was never given the treacle roly-poly that he loved; Mother liked sweetbreads and tiny cutlets and dear little quails, and muscat grapes, and a wine-glass of claret which she rarely drank with her meals but which was left on the sideboard in case she should fancy it later; the person to fancy it later was usually myself, a dear helpful child!) The aforementioned “mattinays” were a sort of glorified rest-gown, long and trailing; in Mother’s case, usually pale grey or pale mauve. There was a sort of velvet called panne which she favoured, and she liked her laces to be caught up with bunches of Parma violets, *très chic*. Whatever could be covered with sequins, she sequined, so that the sitting-rooms and her bedroom were starry with small twinkles when the light was turned on. I loved playing with those tiny boxes with their glass lids showing whether the iridescent spots and circles inside were gold or silver. Ornamental buttons, often in amethyst and highly costly, were bought by Mother practically in van-loads, from William Whiteley’s. Chinchilla was her favourite fur. In later years I used to rack my brain as to what desired gift I could mention to Mother, which she would have to leave *plain*; for she delighted in giving, but her love for me insisted on expressing itself in super-decoration, rosettes and knots of French silk and little rose-buds and so forth. She toiled not, neither did she spin, but she embroidered, yes, by gum she did! The words “austerity” and

"severity" were not included in her system. Once, only once, I got her down to presenting me with a pair of garters which were nothing but serviceable garters; it almost broke her heart. I had to be ruthless, for the last pair she had given me contained miniatures of a dancing pierrette ingeniously adapted and inset in circles of ruching. The odd thing was that Mother could dress herself in this style and by some magic never look cheap or frightful. I have a photograph of her as a girl of eighteen, wearing the costume of a *poudrée* Watteau Shepherdess, and I was told by my aunts that men went frantic to dance with her at this fancy-dress ball.

It must have been fun to be like Mother. After Father died, I learnt to be far more tolerant towards her than I had ever been during his lifetime; learnt to see perhaps that anyone so sweet and gay should not be condemned any more than a child is condemned for the sound of its laughter even when the grown-ups have a headache. For she was always willing to let live as long as she could live. I do not know whether I most wanted to laugh or to cry when only a few years before her death, distressed at my life which seemed to her incomplete since I had divorced my husband, she told me that if I were wanting to take a lover, I need not refrain from fear that she would be upset. "Not that I am asking you to tell me anything," she said; "only I would rather, isn't it, that you were happy."

Mother started off my collection of sticks by giving me a red one with a red toad sitting on top, which she had bought in the arcade at Brighton for three shillings. "Arcade" is an attractive word leading (not always) to Arcady; occasionally to Piccadilly.

A friend of mine who was supposed to be a connoisseur of objects of art and of vertu, after examining my whole collec-

tion, came upon the scarlet toad and said with resolute judgment: ‘‘This one is worth all the rest put together. Red jade, isn’t it?’’

‘‘Yes,’’ I agreed meekly, ‘‘red jade.’’

He missed, however, what I myself imagine to be only about two removed from the top place of honour: a stick christened Blue Peter—the handle a very beautiful carving of a Chinese boy with his cheek propped on his hand, in pensive mood, as though he were mourning over death and catastrophe and yet had found some philosophic, ancient way of acceptance. Stick and handle were both in the same hard light-brown wood from a tree unknown to me. If I were to rush straight on now to fanatic enthusiasms of my other sticks, I wonder how many of you would be exasperated at not hearing why the Chinese boy was called Blue Peter; which is not for any quaint winsome reason, but merely that I picked it up at an antique shop in Broadstairs on Derby Day, and the old man who sold it to me said: ‘‘If you’ve backed a horse for the race, he’ll win. That stick’s going to bring you luck.’’

My rougher sticks, mostly of different sorts of wood of different countries, eccentrically carved, I keep in an excellent old rum-barrel. Among them is a joggleberry, carved by a friend who had lost a leg in 1914, just after he had at least had the fun of rowing for Cambridge, and who lived with us for some time in Italy. Often he carved joggleberries, being an admirer of Mr. Sponge (also of Confucius and Samuel Butler); he whittled them, sitting under an olive tree in a flowering circle of gentian-blue borage. (‘‘You can’t use one flower to describe the colour of another.’’ ‘‘Yes, but I *have*.’’) Borage and wild white garlic and buttony red anemones. And then he laid work aside, and played the ‘‘Londonderry Air’’ on an Elizabethan ivory recorder. My joggleberry stick was made out of olive wood from our olive terraces which ad-

joined his. Between us we had three hundred and one olive trees. I remember the number meticulously, because Mussolini issued an edict in about the year 1927 that all olive trees throughout Italy were to be counted by their owners. It was a tricky matter, counting those olive trees. My husband and myself, Humphrey and his wife Rosemary, the same quartette who had once gone jaunting so happily on a wine-tour through France in the vintage season, shared the job with the gardener, a cheerful savage from the mountains of Piedmont, small and quick and black, who frequently boasted, "Wells and walls, those are my mysteries!" and who remarked that the Signori would do far better to leave him alone to do the Duce's will—"for I am practical, I, for counting the olive trees." But we each thought that five were better than one at this job—which proved an error; for numberless times we found ourselves counting a terrace which had been apportioned to another, and not without argument we added them up and subtracted the terrace we last thought of and at last went home to our soul-satisfying lunch of spaghetti *al burro* and fresh sardines stuffed; and then our gardener, unsupported, counted the olive trees and there were exactly three hundred and one.

A few days ago, I heard of an air-raid on the enemy in which it was said of our planes: "Three hundred and one went out, and three hundred and one came back." This is a beautiful example of bare effective statement which many a stylist would do well to take to heart. At that moment, however, we thought nothing of style, but wrapped it round the heart for comfort's sake, because it had been a black day in other news; and I wondered why suddenly I should find myself drowsily recollecting olive terraces and olive trees in the sunshine after rain, the leaves like burnished pewter on one side and black velvet on the other; and circles of borage and wild white garlic round each trunk, and the high sweet pas-

toral melody of an ivory recorder; and Piedmontin, our gardener, opposing all commands issued by his masters, and at the same time calling them “Sara”, short for Saracen, an ancient habit surviving from centuries before when all the little white hill villages around us with their high defending walls were built to protect the natives from the conquering Saracen who might at any instant invade their shores.

In Denmark, in the deer-forest near Copenhagen, I lost a favourite walking-stick, three years ago. Idiot optimism reaches its zenith in my earnest faith that one day I may find it again in the deer-forest near Copenhagen. It had a crook handle made of alternate rings of ivory, ebony and agate, planned rather like that Turkish dish called “kebab” which they uncurl for you from a skewer, and which then lies on your plate in alternate rings of bacon, chicken-liver and bay-leaf. In spite of the loss of my stick, maddening because it was due to my own carelessness, I shall always be glad now that I impulsively decided to go and see what Denmark was like; and, having seen what it was like, went again a year later because I had fallen in love with Copenhagen. The gaiety of Vienna before 1914 was rapidly dwindling to a legend in 1923, when I first visited it; in 1923 it was no longer gay. Yet here in Copenhagen was the water-life of Venice blended with the gaiety of old Vienna, and laced with that clear, clean, childlike quality which is wholly Hans Andersen and the North.

When I was told that a hill outside Brambleford was a Danish Camp, I felt it quite natural to echo, “Yes, I can see that,” for at once, without any archæological or psychic knowledge of the appearance of Danish Camps when the Danes invaded England in King Alfred’s time, yet surrounded by slopes and fields of that same clear quality of light green and light yellow, simple shapes and washes of colour, lying

serene from evil under a light blue sky, it looked not only essentially English but essentially Danish too. Those cows in the pleasant meadows were descendants of a long-ago Anglo-Danish alliance. They belonged to the toy farm near by, neat and charming and complete. And indeed Copenhagen itself sprang straight up out of the same kingdom of a child's ardent desire to possess importances to the grown-up world such as farms and cities and shops but in a size easy to handle. Mother and Father once brought me a draper's shop from Berlin, a shop two feet by three, encompassing a whole drapery stock-in-trade folded and stacked in drawers and on shelves behind the counter and hanging on rails above the counter: I can even remember a tiny hat and veil tilted coquettishly on a tinier stand with label affixed. And John van Druten brought me from Bavaria (only then I was forty) a miniature model of a Bavarian peasant girl's dower chest, also with everything neat and tidy, stacked up and complete. And Copenhagen was a capital in miniature, with palaces and harbours, squares and opera-houses and barracks, all drawn to scale and presented in its Danish quality of clear blue and white. The cafés with their little tables on the pavements were an echo of lovely insouciant Paris. ("She'll soon find she can't be in-soossy-ant with *me*," a flouted lover complained to me once.) The green copper roofs and domes of church and building and palace might almost have created an illusion that you were in Budapest; if you sat out of doors to eat your breakfast, the pageant of postmen in their red coats, of laughing, blonde midinettes swinging along with flowered carton boxes to deliver, of bicycles and sweepers and soldiers, seemed so much more like a ballet of a little city starting the day, than the real thing: the worried bowler-hatted procession filing into the Underground, which (once, long ago) we associated with the beginning of daily work.

But what most of all endeared Copenhagen to an ardent water-lover like myself, was its pleasant matter-of-fact way of treating the magical privilege of being in a capital situated not only on a river (London-on-the-Thames, Paris-on-the-Seine, Berlin-on-the-Spree, Rome-on-the-Tiber, and so forth in a Lower Third singsong) but where river and sea, canals and waterways, were treated as though they were indispensable, busy streets of water with little intimate motor boats running about like busses, picking you up at the steps just beyond the bridge, taking you down to the fish market where Krug's famous old fish restaurant suggested stopping for lunch, taking you down to the Stock Exchange with its green copper roofs, or past the wharves to the open harbour; stopping to set passengers down, stopping to pick up passengers with parcels and baskets; not sight-seers and tourists, but good-humoured comfortable Danish men and women who paid their few öre and travelled by water as a matter of course. I never grew bored with viewing the life of Copenhagen from a seat in one of these boats. When you came to Langelinie, if you were a tourist (as I was), you got off and looked at the yachts rocking in the harbour, the King's yacht among them, shining and white; and then you sauntered along to the Yacht Club Restaurant and ate a glorified fish which turned out to be plaice. In England and France plaice is no more than an understudy to sole; but in Denmark it commands respectful cooking and highest praise. Lunch over (but not, thank goodness, by any means slighted), you went on a simple Andersen errand to see the "Little Mermaid" statue in green bronze. She sat on a rock near the shore in a musing slippery attitude, her legs poured away into fishtail shape, a slim, graceful child; but I could not imagine her ever walking barefoot on sharp swords for disconsolate love of an earthly Prince.

Back again to the city and the bracing, sunshiny air, chug-

ging through canals of old houses and shops, past the tall wharf buildings, with faded green shutters on walls of dark winy red and brown and mellow purple, past the tugs and the barges, till on the left you saw a church with a copper spire and a staircase winding in spirals to the very tip. It looked all right, and apparently the architect who designed it was perfectly happy until a tactless friend pointed out that the spiral went the wrong way; at which, in the exaggerated manner of artists, he nodded silently, went to the top and cast himself down to his death. And do you not think, dear children, that he was a very silly man? Because I assure you that nobody would ever have known, except a few other architects, and he could always have interrupted them with a chilly: "Please, I make it my rule never to talk shop." It was perhaps a little unfortunate that the erring staircase should be outside the church and not inside, where the poor architect might have had a chance to forget it, say just for lunchtime or for an evening in the Tivoli Garden. The universal desire to believe "he is not really dead" might have evolved a legend that he has gone to live in America where, in time, he would have acquired a reputation as a new and really unusual kind of King Bore: "You see that guy? He sure is bats. Some tale he's always telling you about a staircase."

In the similar incident of Louis XIV's chef who committed suicide because he had forgotten the fish course, the right reply was: "You damn well do without fish for once, see? You've had your bellyful to eat, haven't you? Or haven't you?" (*Avez-vous ou avez-vous?*)

For might they not both sometimes wake from deep sleep to think: "Well, it would be good to be alive and in Copenhagen (or in Paris) on a fine day like this, even though my staircase twisted the wrong way (even though I left out the fish course). Chump that I was to have forfeited life for

vanity's sake! If I were alive, now, and in Copenhagen (in Paris) . . .”

But “now” meant when I was in Copenhagen in 1937, not *now*. Now, in 1940, we have either recovered enough of our sense of proportion to realize how happiness did not depend on the bend of a spiral staircase. Or perhaps we have temporarily lost it in the turmoil and confusion, and fail to see any more that an artist has vision, and that vision is truth, and that if he should fall short of it his self-respect will sicken and die, and then his creative power—so that he might as well die himself.

For if what matters supremely is not what you have done but what you think you have committed against the cause of perfect achievement, then, from that motive, the architect's suicide has an air which is sublime as well as ridiculous; from that motive it is a declaration of faith in perfect achievement.

The fish market of Copenhagen beside its principal canal is a watery equivalent of Oxford Circus; here the hearty fishwives, with newspapers pinned into huge caps, display on their barrows a magnificent shining panorama of sea-food, some of it still squirming. It is reported that if you dare question the quality of, for instance, a herring, they literally throw it in your teeth, for their trade makes them short-tempered; but of this I saw nothing and believed nothing. In Denmark everyone I met was courteous and helpful. Oskar Davidsen's restaurant stood in the centre of the town, so I only went there once for lunch as I have a mania, which Copenhagen can gratify, for eating beside water, on water, above water, to the gurgling accompaniment of water or the lapping of water, and watching the shimmer of water and the light upon water (I mean water) till all my senses, from being water-

attentive, are lulled and replete and drowned in water, till all tiny, distant sounds of water are blended together like an early summer symphony when, if you yield to listening, the rapturous song of innumerable larks and a horse's distant whinny and far-away cock-crow and wind softly combing through the grasses near your ear and plovers on a plaintive nostalgic note, all mount and mingle and pass into high silence.

Let us now drop down and back to Oskar Davidsen's, whose lay-out reminded me of our own Cheshire Cheese. Here you could order shrimps per portion, per double portion, per pyramid portion. The pyramid portion contained, so it said on the menu, 130 to 140 shrimps. My companion, a moderate man, counted up to the first 67 and then abandoned himself to the rest with his wonted abstemious air, so useful and so misleading when dealing with pyramid portions. You could also order something called "shrimps in a crowd" (double layer with two extra rows, 80-100 shrimps). As for sprats, as for herrings, sardines, eels and lobster and crawfish and pickled limfjord oysters and cod roe—Oh, well, never mind. I paid for it all with three and a half months' fasting on orange juice; but of this (as I have not said for many pages) more hereafter. And everybody will be sympathetic who knows what Swedish and Danish smörgas can be like. I began with a dish indicated on the menu as "No. 54, Hans Andersen's favourite (crisp bacon, tomato, liver paste with truffles, meat-jelly and horseradish)." The pernickety mind, questing always for facts and figures, wonders how often Hans Andersen was able to order and digest and pay for the favourite dish to which he gave his name? Once, perhaps, and a deep, contented sigh, and "How I would like this every day!" And sleep appearing in a vision of a dog with eyes as big as saucers, as big as windmills, as big as towers . . .

Wherever you go in Denmark you drink schnapps, which

keeps you lively against heavy odds. Oskar Davidsen's wines were a treat, and he stocked every liqueur under the sun; but still we drank schnapps, which, as you doubtless know, looks like clear water but startles, charms and stimulates the unsophisticated tongue by an effect of ice and fire simultaneously. It cannot do much harm if you eat plentifully while you drink it; but afterwards, if you are wise, forsake your shrimp-besotted companions and step into a boat and do the circular trip, through canals, past wharves, through the harbour and out to sea and back again to the landing stage, and remain sitting where you are, and do it again as many times as you please, until you are soothed by the rhythm into meditation and peace. If you stay long enough on the little boat as it swishes busily about its duties, your skipper will cease to treat you as an ordinary tourist and will examine your increasing handful of tickets with respect, for you are by now an Ancient Mariner and are well justified to hold up any wedding-feast. Even after the sun has set, there will still be no reason why you should get off until they put you off.

*Look thy last on all things lovely,
Every hour.*

If we have reached a place which appeals to us for some reason not ever to be defined—Copenhagen and Provence, the coast of Cornwall and the coast of Kent, Skye, San Francisco, Orford estuary and all the moors of the north of England, our own significant kingdom of here and now—then we say, as that feeling of well-being settles round the heart: “I shall come back, and I shall come back often.” But that is to cheat ourselves. We know perfectly well that, life being what it is, we may or we may not come back; and the real feeling behind our slightly defiant announcement was Walter de la Mare's

"Look thy last on all things lovely, every hour." A. E. Housman, too, crystallised this blend of deep content and premonition:

*And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.**

You may argue that Housman gives us fifty years almost for certain, and Walter de la Mare perhaps only an hour; but I think that in itself Housman's urgency to spring up and rush off to the woodlands at once to see the cherry hung with snow, confessed to the same doubt which attacked us as children when Nannie used to say: "No, you're to come in *now*. I dare say the buttercups'll wait." And we would be aware, passionately, that the buttercups might not wait, nor the little stream that ran clear and shallow under the plank bridge; and the hawthorn bushes at the end of the buttercup field, they might not wait either, not till tomorrow nor until next spring. Or rather, we knew that *they* might wait, but we might not. "I dare say," said Nannie, but how dared she say, when she only wanted to wash our hair or something stupid like that? Something that would wait, because it did not matter.

Yet we cannot translate "Look thy last on all things lovely" as a gloomy warning that we may die at any moment or be called in to have our hair washed or not be able to return to Copenhagen. That would be a spoil-sport interpretation, and Walter de la Mare is no spoil-sport. The idea, the truth, the urgency in the lines, the stress, is on *look*, and the fear that we should fail to look and respond to miracles; a fear of our eyes closing in death while we are still alive. After we are

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dead and after we have looked our last in that final sense, we may see the cherry trees in bloom again, or we may not. A poet is not responsible for beauty's appeal to us after death, but he may well feel he has an urgent responsibility towards man alive. It is a call of hope, not with the useless fear of death in sixty minutes lying chill upon it; it is a call to arms meant for the soul, meant to sharpen the appreciation, the gratitude, the excitement, the freshness of amazement which we may have allowed to fall drowsy; it is a reaction from defeatism, not towards it. Stevenson knew this when he implored for a sharp pain to “stab my spirit broad awake,” even if the flesh were to die the next moment. And Marcus Aurelius (was it?) said in prose, very much as Walter de la Mare said in poetry, that the wise man should strive to live every hour as though it were his last.

For to look your last on all things lovely is the same as to look your first on all things lovely. Every hour.

No, there is no graveyard shadow on that thought, yet there is another flying shadow which cannot be helped; nostalgia again; elusive, perhaps absurd, for we may feel homesick not only when like Ruth we stand among the alien corn, but when we are in the very place of here and now where we desired to be, Skye, Copenhagen, Provence, New York, and still feel it because beauty is there, and beauty compels the mind to repeat those or similar lines, and they are beautiful too; and because fifty years is not long enough, nor five hundred years; and because we feared we should never see this beloved place again, and we are seeing it; in short, because poets are poets, and we, it had better be confessed, are chumps, but living chumps, glad to be feeling *too* well in the morning, in the afternoon, the evening and the night.

Yet it is curious that when a poet dies and you re-read his poetry it would seem as though every line confesses that he

knew all the time he was going to die almost at once. This is nonsense, of course; we all know we have to die, and poets are not exempt. Perhaps I mean simply that their poetry sounds afterwards as though they had a foreknowledge that we should be reading it and thinking: "How strange! It's as if he had known!"

Italy has in the past awoken this nostalgia in the heart of our English poets, more than any other country abroad. I lived there for five years, and all the while my longings were reversed (but then I am no poet). All the while I never stopped remembering that I did not belong there; I was a guest on sufferance; I was living away from my own home. I enjoyed the ripe figs; the freesias and anemones growing wild in the long grass on the olive terraces; the sunshine, the colour of the Mediterranean, and bathing in the Mediterranean. I never wearied of the miracle of beauty which fell upon the surrounding hills and olive groves and little white-towered villages, at the hush of sunset. But I felt an exile, nevertheless, and wondered at Shelley and Byron and Browning; for though Browning wrote, "Oh, to be in England" (specifying definitely which month), he did not pour into it the same imagination as into "The Englishman in Italy" and "Up at a Villa—Down in the City," where he identified himself with the Italian spirit so vividly that you could not believe that he preferred buttercups to "the gaudy melon flower."

Shortly after the crisis which found a respite at Munich, I gave a dinner-party for about seventy people. No, not in my own dining-room (it has never been that sort of dining-room); in a restaurant, which therefore invited publicity, as many of my friends happened to be famous writers. Towards the end of the party a reporter approached me ("approached" is, I think, the word) and asked me to give him a line on

the original purpose of the party. He must have been reading “Alice” (“If a fish came to *me*, and told me he was going a journey, I should say ‘With what porpoise?’”). When he asked me this, I was stumped. A party without a “porpoise” was obviously incredible. I should like to have been able to reply, as the Duchess of Richmond might have done: “Because I have a presentiment that the Battle of Waterloo is going to be fought tomorrow.” My real reasons were too cloudy for publication: I had received hospitality from all my friends for two or three years without adequately returning it, and had been taught from early childhood the ancient and honourable sport of flinging back the cutlet; also I prefer parties to consist of two, of four, or of seventy.

“Couldn’t you just say,” I faltered, “that I wanted to see my friends?”

The reporter eyed me as though I were feeble-minded, as indeed I was at that moment. “Perhaps,” he suggested, “you are giving a party to celebrate the Peace?”

Immediately I picked up my little hatchet and cut him down like a cherry-tree.

“Well,” he gasped helplessly, “then what *am* I to say?”

I glanced round for inspiration and caught sight of a cherub face, round blue eyes with up-curling lashes, a wise forehead and a childlike smile; refreshed, I turned triumphantly to the reporter: “You may state”—firmly—“that I have given this party in honour of Mr. Max Beerbohm’s return to England from Italy.”

This Return was well worth celebrating, apart from our admiration for Max writings and Max cartoons, for the sake of the flashes of truth, gently, even confidentially, whispered as though some character in Boccaccio were relating some sly and roguish anecdote of his monkish career. I asked him once whether he liked an artist whom we both knew. “Not at all,”

replied Sir Max (he was still Mr. Beerbohm then) with such decision and promptness as to surprise me. I became school-girlish, but I hope eloquent in defence. The rest of the company claimed his attention before we had quite settled the matter. As he was leaving and I reverently handed him his hat and his scarf, I apologised for having perhaps appeared too overheated: "Probably I'm wrong and you're right," I said, controlling myself from adding "Master." (Because they hate it, these Masters: I have been in a room with three at a time, and they kept tucking their feet away for fear I should sit at them and yearn.) "No," said Max Beerbohm, "if two people cannot agree about a third person whom they both know, the one who likes him is right, always."

Truth flashed like lightning, as it must have flashed throughout the Sermon on the Mount.

I am delighted to think that now he no longer dwells up at a villa in Italy, his excuse has ceased to exist for not writing more than he has during the last few years. Made bold by my share in a bottle of the famous Steinberg Cabinet 1921, the last in my cellar (as I had neither the decency nor the strength of mind to refrain from mentioning to him), I attacked him for his laziness. "Well, you see, the truth is this: I can *only* write with a quill pen, and where I live in Italy there are no geese . . ." His voice trailed away and he courteously drank my health.

*(Au clair de la lune,
Pierrot répondit;
Je n'ai pas de plume,
Je suis dans mon lit.)*

Perhaps where he lives now, they can keep a gaggle of geese dedicated to the Master, for literature and for roasting.

Mr. Philip Guedalla, at whose house I first met Sir Max, has a collection of practically all the original Beerbohm cartoons which he has hung along the hall and the whole way up two flights of stairs. A prettier sight I have rarely seen than the artist being coaxed upstairs into the drawing-room on the first floor. Every line of his back, as he paused to linger and yet again paused, expressed chubby surprise of the dear-me-did-I-well-I-never variety; the most hard-hearted Nannie could not have called, ‘‘Come *along* now, Master Max, do,’’ under those circumstances.

Most delightfully astringent was that Max series of cartoons in which the child met the man he had afterwards become, and passed a few devastating remarks, scrawled (with a quill pen) in the corner of the drawing. Few reproofs could be more salutary. To get rid of oneself is a highly desirable process, but it is first necessary to meet oneself, and this is even physically a difficult matter. When we suddenly catch sight of ourselves in a mirror, not aware beforehand that the mirror is there, we nearly always have to be treated for slight shock, lain flat, kept warm, injected with eight pints of water and so forth. Coming away after a party, a well-placed mirror has frequently informed me that all the evening I had been behaving above my looks. In collecting evidence to aid a true encounter with yourself, you amass a heap of contradictory material: surprise snapshots, for instance, showing how you appear to others in your moments of spontaneous grace. More subtle, though probably less painful, is re-meeting a letter or any other portion of your identity from which you have been divorced for a long time. ‘‘Look,’’ a friend may remark, holding out a worn and smudgy envelope. ‘‘Do you remember when you wrote me this? I wonder why I kept it,’’ she may remark; ‘‘it was such ages ago.’’ It has left you, it has gone through the post, it has (not unnaturally) been opened and

read, thrust away and forgotten; yet a bit of yourself, your eternally silly self, sticks behind it somewhere from long ago. Or when you revisit a cottage where you had stayed in Bradenham or in the Cotswolds or in Cornwall during some gay lost period of your life: "When was it, Mrs. Pender?" "Eh, my dear life, must be going on tu nineteen years, sure-lye." ("Surelye" is Sussex, but it might as well go in here, to give dialect a leg up.) And again you stare at the remarks written in the Visitors' Book, in your changeless handwriting, praising the cream, the pasties, the saffron buns and the grilled mackerel; it looks rather helpless, somehow; thus, emotionally speaking, might a sturgeon feel on being shown a stale caviare sandwich. Only once did I mislay my handwriting altogether: I had to sign a special edition of two hundred and fifty copies. My writing, if plain, has, so they tell me, a certain rugged personality; but that personality disappeared at about the seventh copy. After that, I began signing in the spiky plaintive hand of a spinster German governess; and then large and dashing like the signatures which you find on photographs of "Dolly and Tootsie, yours to a cinder!" left to the landlady in theatrical lodgings; and then round and laborious like a child of eight doing its best and breathing hard; and then quite illegible like the handwriting of E. V. Lucas.

And now I am convinced that no one could write a novel about the essential antagonism of man and woman better than you. You hint at it there; and you know, evidently, that they belong to different nations, talk different languages, think different thoughts.

I wonder if I agree with what he wrote. If it is true that such antagonism exists, some of it may be traced to a habit of men who fling out loose and lordly statements about women, such as "Women can't keep secrets!"—the truth of

that unjust accusation being that nobody can keep secrets, but some men and women try a little harder than other men and women. For let us not pretend that any of us like keeping a secret, a good secret, rather round and glossy, with a lot of meaty stuff in the centre.

Admittedly, it is no good locking the stable door once the horse has been stolen. But even before the horse is stolen, little good is served by locking the unstable door.

A secret only really becomes a secret when we tell it (The Lily of Malud is born in secret mud). While lying in safe deposit, it is just a lump: no animation in it, no potentiality. It is when lying in unsafe deposit that it comes to life; to its quivering, tantalising heritage of lily life, petals unfolding one by one, or, to change the metaphor, when you first glimpse the lift and stir and swell of golden seaweed under water, rising into sight and breath, sinking and swishing down again, deep, deep down . . .

Naturally I *can* keep secrets. I'm the best secret-keeper in the world if I happen to want to exert myself. (The drunkards' argument is invariably that they *can* keep off the drink quite easily, but that they don't care to, not just at that moment.)

At school—

“Swear?” we would say, passionately.

“Swear!”

Or, in more vulgar language: “See this wet, see this dry—”

Seemingly it never occurred to our fresh and honest souls that this very prelude of making someone promise not to tell, in itself betrays a first betrayal. And that they then have just as much right as ourselves to carry it on to yet another person, taking the same simple precautions. (“You won't tell?” “No, of course I won't.” “Swear?” “Swear.”)

When a secret comes up against a scrupulously, literally, exactly faithful person, then it stops dead, loses its kick, becomes a sleeping clod.

There are secrets which really *must not* be told; and if they come our way we recognise them at once and clamp down on them. Wild horses would not draw them out of us, not so much because we have promised, but simply because we can see for ourselves, not being idiots, that real harm would come of telling. And anyhow, there would be no fun in telling that kind; no fun at all. But there is the secret you promise not to tell, agreeing that it is important it should not get out, and you *ache* in all your bones from the sheer effort of not telling; you go about looking compressed, with stern noble lines about your mouth. And then at least seven other people walk in and tell *you*.

That is a little discouraging.

And another kind: You keep it safe as houses, and earn a tremendous reputation for a cloistered tongue, and all the while it is because the secret itself is so flimsy and colourless that after you have vowed and swelled and crossed your heart, you forget it before you are out of the room. Simply by being unimportant, it manages to keep itself inviolate. Or in violet.

The usual mistake in the technique of secret receivers is to pretend not to want to hear it: "Of course, dear, you mustn't pass on something intended for your ears alone." But this always has the effect of making the guardian of the secret ashamed of his impulse and uncertain how to manoeuvre himself creditably past that shame. It is a pity secrets cannot be abolished when children are sadistic little brutes, and they often are, and use it as a form of torture: "Oo, it's a secret, you mayn't listen!" and they shoo poor little Ishmael out of the secret orchard into the desert. To them, and to the

grown-up children with the same nature (but it can just as well be men as women), the essence and joy of a secret is not the matter itself, which may be tough and torrid, and may be tender and trivial, but the vicious power it gives them to exclude others; to create suspense or to enjoy that sinister thrill of wickedness, that twitching of the toes, that delicious insecurity and danger from knowing that, after all, the receiver might pass it on.

(A Greek servant lay prone on the earth and whispered it a secret. And when the ears of corn grew up, they rustled the secret to the passing wind: ‘‘Midas has ass’s ears. But you won’t tell, will you? Promise?’’)

Truly it is as difficult to keep oneself to oneself (that extraordinary expression) as it is to get rid of oneself. If you write novels, you will find that a character nearly always emerges who, instead of being objective like the others, is no more nor less than Yourself wanting to pass a few remarks. This, indeed, need not be the hero or heroine; it may be a very minor character, but never wholly unlovable. Or sometimes, on the contrary, a friend will write a biography in which you feature ever so nicely, but all the same you walk about for a few days eyeing yourself with uneasy speculation, and muttering: ‘‘Did I? Was I? Am I?’’

A study of the proofs of studio portraits when we pose exhibiting what we imagine to be our most characteristic and natural expression, may depress us for a day, but they add to the external evidence about this odd irrepressible *me* which has to be eliminated if we are to have any peace at all.

If you have the luck to possess a friend whose frankly expressed opinion of you is like contact with a nutmeg-grater, that ought to help a lot. The opinion is (of course) unjust, wicked, jealous, biased and just too stupid for anything; but

again, there might be something in it; though I am inclined to believe that a tactless friend who merely blurts will do more to help us meet ourselves than a malicious one who "with his little pin bores through his castle wall, and farewell king."

Browning's opinion that we all have two soul sides, one to face the world with and one to show a woman when we love her, was much too flattering to the self-esteem; because both these soul sides sound equally charming. Max in his cartoons, Stevenson in his "Jekyll and Hyde"—the first in bland ironic amusement, the second by sheer horror—came nearer the paradox that of each one of us there are at least two.

I was once arguing with an arrogant young friend about a girl whom he had never met, but whom he firmly disliked for all the wrong reasons. In order to convince him, I described her (with apparent innocence) as a character exactly like himself, emphasising all his own virtues. He listened attentively, and then exclaimed:

"If that's true, if she's really like *that*, all I can say is that she must be *pretty fine*."

This naïf reaction was touching; I should gladly have embraced him and shed tears, but it would have been so difficult to explain why.

Have you ever played a Truth Game? You were shoved into it as a child, in misery, confusion, embarrassment, shame and bitterness. And then for many years, while life was real and earnest, you played it no more—until you started going to sophisticated house-parties, where these astonishing Truth Games reappeared, always with the proviso attached: "Let's make it a rule that *nobody present* is to come into it." Having made such an excellent rule, you broke it. At least, the others broke it, and then, of course, you had to break it yourself. The truth is that playing Truth Games, while pretending that

they are to remain purely abstract and historical, is like pretending that you want lemonade when really you pine for whisky. This is not a manual of parlour entertainments, and so I need not describe Truth Games, nor how they lead to misery, confusion, embarrassment, shame and bitterness.

During a war—during this war, in fact—it would seem more than ever essential to meet oneself with the idea of getting rid of oneself. This is “trimmensely” difficult (the word originated from a German film producer). For getting rid of oneself altogether is not quite the same thing as trying hard to be unselfish, working upward from a basis of self. And is spilling oneself any help towards getting rid of oneself, I wonder. Confucius said: “To devote oneself to irregular speculation is decidedly harmful.” Heartily agreeing with Confucius, one may still go on wondering, hoping that this sort of speculation need not count as irregular; for spilling oneself by religious confession, by confidences to friends, in autobiography, or during treatment by psychoanalysis, have all been recommended as the best way, if not the only way, to rid oneself of oneself. Yet the analogy is bad; to “spill” argues at once a slopping over at the edges—as wine from a glass, staining the tablecloth. The wine needs changing, not spilling. “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.”

We can roughly discern within ourselves three layers: what we show to the world; what we hide from it, but believe we really are; and underneath that, what we really *are*. The first and the third are inevitable; it is on our arrangement of the second, that dishonesty gets a footing. And it was with this second level of the self that Freud mainly concerned himself, bringing along a whole searchlight apparatus to expose our busy scrabbling attempts, in the semidarkness, to rationalise all that we cannot bear to meet in ourselves. Freud tried to make a straight road upwards between the third and

first levels, cutting out the second; between what we really are and what we show the world; or rather, he sought to prove that the existing road was not straight but many spiral staircases all twisting the wrong way, like the one designed by the architect at Copenhagen.

I once read a brief account in the papers of testimony at the County Assizes that a girl had embezzled three hundred pounds and squandered it all on expensive presents to her friends and relations, buying nothing for herself. Her Counsel for the Defence called it a Lady Bountiful complex. "Nothing at all for herself?" asked my friend, incredulously, when I recounted this incident. Immediately I replied, correcting my first spontaneous narrative: "Yes, just one thing: ermine." But when I looked at the newspaper again there was no mention of ermine. What, then, had been the association in my mind to prompt this certainty? What was my own ermine complex?

I once went to a doctor who had practised autosuggestion for many years with great success. I doubt if I was a good subject for autosuggestion, for I was at once too obliging and not responsive enough. That is to say, when he suggested to me in a steady hypnotic voice that I should not be able to refrain from opening my hand with the disc in it, I most obligingly opened it slowly, the fingers gradually loosening. I could almost swear that I did it so as not to disappoint him; or it might have been from a less amiable motive, not to disappoint me, having hoped to prove amenable; his explanation would be that I *thought* I could quite easily have prevented myself (as dozens of his patients had said afterwards), but that that was just a reasonable illusion, the mysterious reality being that I could *not* have helped myself. His method, an excellent one, was to prove, while the patient was in his actual presence, that suggestion could be planted in

the mind and made to act; so that, encouraged by this, you would more easily offer yourself for his suggestions towards spiritual help, convinced that your subconscious would react as easily as when the disc was allowed to drop from the loosening fingers.

In fairness to autosuggestion, I must testify that the answer came once strangely and clearly, at about our fourth interview: the same answer which I have already described as happening to myself and to many others like a flash of truth after drugs or an anæsthetic, or, rarely but more gloriously, in the midst of ordinary daily life. His suggestion was that I should wake up the next morning with that fit of black depression rolled away. He honestly explained, at every consultation, that he could do nothing about the causes of the depression; he was no alchemist to turn leaves into gold if gold was wanted, or indeed gold into leaves if the weary millionaire with dyspepsia longed for that fresh vernal feeling of hedges putting out their young shoots. (“Uncle John, what do you do when you feel *too* well in the morning?”) On the following dawn I woke with a thrill of pure happiness which came from seeing that everything was truly in perfect proportion, and that my own troubles need therefore never destroy me again as they had been destroying me before. I fell asleep, joyfully sure of this; by the commonplace everyday morning, I had nearly reverted to my horrid commonplace everyday mood. When I say “nearly,” I mean that I never slipped back so far as to deny the vision.

The slangy phrase, “Rise above it,” might be advice towards ridding oneself of self by spiritual levitation—directly opposed to that human instinct, when in a tumult of mind which seems too hard to be borne, to fling oneself on the bed or on the grass or even onto the floor, as far down as possible, burrowing with mole-like passion close to the earth, closer

and closer, identifying oneself with the earth. While vertical, you still have to struggle on, aware of all that is being done to you. Horizontal, you can achieve a certain blessed immunity. However, the snag is that presently, whatever the circumstances, you will have to get up from the bed, from the hearthrug, from the slope of the hill, and reluctantly resume the aspect of a human being, crumpled and far from divinity (but still, you cannot lie there for ever). After uplift, we return to earth; after too much earth, we get up for dinner. Yet both might be manifestations of an ardent desire to get rid of oneself. Obviously the path of Yoga is the better of the two, higher *and* fewer. Yet I should say that Yoga successfully practised, or any form of the eastern cults of immunity from the world's pains, may be good for the soul but bad for creative work, in the way that all separation from the common consciousness must be bad for creative work. For instead of mucking in with the rest of us you will have acquired the power of surveying the rest of us serenely; and so love by identification must perforce get lost as the distance widens. However, in the *New Yorker's* illustration of the fakir's honeymoon, where he smilingly invites his little bride to a bed studded with drawing-pins, point upwards, if that be his idea of a good honeymoon, then what? Rise above it. Like Icarus independent of wings, like I-forget-his name in H. G. Wells' short story who so desired to "lose weight" that his wish was granted in the letter though not in the spirit, scorn of gravity is strong enough to float a million legends and fables, though so far it has failed to float the majority off the ground except with an aeroplane attached. Still and always, like little Humphrey in "Misunderstood," a luscious book of Victorian childhood, we fling ourselves flat on the hearthrug in the dim curtained drawing-room with the dust-sheets over the furniture, and remain there, heartbroken and

sobbing because we are misunderstood and nobody cares.

During the eighties and nineties, far more "sad books" were published than during the last forty years; sad books about children who were persecuted for religion's sake, or lived in slums, or were crippled or kidnapped, and, more often than not, died early. Often they were persecuted *and* lived in slums, *and* were crippled, *and* died early. Victorian children were given "Misunderstood," "The Wide, Wide World," "The Story of a Short Life," "Home Influence," and a book by Marie Corelli called "The Mighty Atom," the touching story of a small boy who hanged himself in his own sash. (I shall always remember that particular story, because it was at the time when I wore sashes myself, and was therefore locally interested.) It may have been that in Victorian days, children were often so severely and cruelly treated, so smothered and reduced to unimportance, that their wistful treatment in fiction as little martyrs and little angels, as Little Nell, Little Paul Dombey, Tiny Tim, was to enable Victorians to get rid of all their sentimentality through rich and sobbing unreality, leaving no further need of it when their actual flesh-and-blood children were sent for by Papa to be punished for voices raised and feet scampering on the stairs outside his sacred study. Victorian England might well be described as the hotbed of Papa. Grown-ups of that period enjoyed "sad" books, as compared with stories now which are grim and savage and ironic, but practically never "sad." Sad also worked out at a young heroine having a Misunderstanding with the man she loved, and they Parted (mutt and chump) and she Wedded a much older Gentleman, a friend of her father's, because her father was Weak, Foolish, Ruined. Then she began to have consumption, and discovered too late that he had never received the letter she had written to her love (nay, not her lover—an *r* in the

month makes all the difference, so to speak) explaining everything; a letter which she had posted in a bowl of potpourri instead of in the postbox, thinking he would surely think of looking for it there. (Ah, how could Fate have done this to her!) At any rate, it was too late and she died. And the readers of the book had a hearty Victorian dinner of both roast and boiled (*épergne* on the table and chandelier above it) feeling all the better for this fruity emotional experience through which they had just passed.

Helen Mathers, Rhoda Broughton and Mrs. Hungerford catered for an enormous public with a taste for "sad" books more or less on these lines. "Comin' Thro' the Rye," "Cometh Up As a Flower," "Molly Bawn," "Not Wisely but Too Well," and "Red As a Rose Is She" (emphatically not the same as the *Scarlet Woman*). Most of these stories were quaintly written in the first person singular and in the present tense. In one of them, the heroine looks at herself in the mirror on her wedding morning: "I was dressed in a white muslin gown, as simple as a nun's . . . and I looked as like a snowdrop as possible." I like "as possible"!

Mr. Lloyd George, discussing the books that he cared for most "in my youth," a youth which has already covered well over seventy years, mentioned Rhoda Broughton, and particularly "Red As a Rose Is She," among his favorites. As a contrast, he also liked Fielding; but he suggested that it might possibly have been the attraction of Fielding's "naughtiness." Dickens headed and still heads his list, yet he cannot read Thackeray. He devoured Stevenson and the historical novelists, Dumas, Stanley Weyman, and Blackmore. The mention of Wilkie Collins made his eyes sparkle; and Trollope; Meredith too, because he said he liked "reading about battles" (this, by the way, was on an evening about seven years ago, not a strictly current opinion). We began to quarrel when he

said he liked Charlotte Brontë better than Jane Austen, and stopped quarrelling over early Kipling and Wells. He mentioned that he could not read Arnold Bennett, but was very keen on George Moore in curtailed doses. George Moore himself, in whose bright lexicon there was no such word as “curtail,” would have disputed that reservation for all he was worth. We finally firmly knotted our literary tastes over Ouida.

I have already spoken of the somewhat flamboyant influence of Ouida in my young life. An excellent memoir by Yvonne French has appeared with the subtitle, “A Study in Ostentation.” It was a Victorian idiom—Galsworthy used it many times in the Forsyte Saga—that So-and-so would “cut up very warm.” In this volume Ouida cuts up very warm indeed. “A Study in Ostentation” is amusing but a little unfair; ostentatious, Ouida certainly was, and where manners are in question, she was definitely not house-trained; yet with equal justice it might have been called, “A Study in Courage.”

On her death in 1908 a leader in one weekly paper said: “She died honoured and respected, having taken the wages of life like a man.” “Like a man” would have pleased Ouida more than any other tribute; Miss French simply and effectively sums her up when she says: “She was perpetually in love; heroes she had to have.” A quotation along the same theme, from Ouida herself, reveals her in all her magnificence and absurdity: “Je n’écris pas pour les femmes. J’écris pour les militaires.” Indeed, the word-association that first springs to our minds at the mention of this author is “Guardsmen.” Bertie Cecil, Viscount Royallieu, known as Beauty of the Brigade. With what a thrill we read “Under Two Flags,” always at a much too tender age, quivering with delight when La Zou-Zou drove him down, white ponies and blue reins,

to the Star and Garter at Richmond, where from the terrace (apparently an impossible range) they flung half-guinea peaches to the swans below! Another thrilling memory from "Moths": a brutal Russian Grand Duke writing to his pure young wife in love with the handsome tenor: "I have shot your singing bird in the throat. *He will not sing again.*" This was the stuff to give your pure young wives, when their pure young lips curled too contemptuously. Yes, we cannot but regret having ourselves missed by so few years the Ouida three-volume-novel period; its pace and vitality flung, uninhibited, into such reckless arrogant insolent phrases; a period when life was divided into peasants and aristocrats; and when Ouida, a whole wanton pageant of one, drove daily through sunlit Florence in her sumptuous little victoria, dressed in gleaming white satin, surrounded by her sentinel dogs, and holding in her lap an expensive bouquet.

She grew up with a tuppence-coloured expectation of life and what it was to bring her; remained an impenitent snob from cradle to tomb; despised all women except her mother, to whom she was devoted; fiercely protected dogs and the underdog; and squandered her pound with such lavish disregard of prudent axioms about the happiness of keeping down expenditure to nineteen and six, that she was never out of debt. She fell madly in love with Mario, the great singer, and then even more madly with the Marchese della Stufa, and last with Lord Lytton (Owen Meredith), all gallant romantic gentlemen who had little use for her; yet her saner self had a shrewd, critical knowledge of politics and literature, and, condoning nothing, raised battle on every possible and impossible occasion. She probably hated her own harsh lack of feminine allure more even than she hated compromise, cruelty, and her enemies. She sank into more and more fantastic ruts of poverty, proudly refusing all assistance, and

died in exile at Viareggio, a grim, lonely figure, yet with every right to claim the last words of Cyrano for her own:

*Où, vous m'arrachez tout, le laurier et la rose!
Arrachez! Il y a malgré vous quelque chose
Que j'emporte . . .
Quelque chose que sans un pli, sans une tache,
J'emporte malgré vous, et c'est—mon panache.*

Had she been less ugly, poor Ouida, she could have stood for a Mid-Victorian *belle au bois dormant*, literally and symbolically; for the trees in the avenue leading up to the Villa Farinola at Scandici were by her orders allowed to grow into such a thorny barrier that visitors had to slash a way through before they could approach the front door; and her behaviour betrayed an invisible barrier even more thorny and impenetrable which she had thrown up to prevent any contact with kindly ordinary humans.

Like so many people with Byronic delusions of grandeur, the naked Ouida emerges from legend and exaggeration as an infinitely pathetic little creature whose stoic qualities compel respect.

It is odd that between the ages of eight and twelve I should have been capable of reading Ouida and Mrs. Molesworth with equal abandon. I gather that neo-Georgian juvenile fiction still has a strong flavour of Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll and G. E. Farrow; nonsense books, in fact, but with a strong zoological or aeronautic flavouring. Nonsense books with nonsense words must always be popular. Standing on my Adam mantelpiece was a little blue and silver tree, less than two feet high, a present from John van Druten. It arrived in an enormous wooden case from New York; they could hardly get it up the seventy-two stairs; within the outer box it was

encased in so many inner boxes and wrappings that I expected ultimately a pea or at best a walnut lying breathless in cotton-wool. That tree bore a strange fruit which at once I recognised as gombobbles. "This is a gombobble tree!" I said, nonchalantly botanical. It was only when I discovered that nobody knew what I meant except those who in their youth had read the Wallypug books, that I realised gombobble is not what is known as a dictionary word. "Chortle," on the other hand, has, I believe, found its way into the dictionary: "O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay! He chortled in his joy!"

At this point of my reflections I heard a child in the next garden give a joyous chortle which inevitably means a practical joke successfully brought off, and which means equally that someone else, probably a grown-up, is *not* chortling.

My special camping-place for reading, as a child, was uncomfortably crouched on the floor at the foot of the forbidden shelves in the dining-room. There with a loud Ave, an ecstatic Salve and a woebegone Vale, I discovered "Jane Eyre." In those days reading was to me a wild abandon, whereas now it is, more often than not, a sober though unbreakable habit. As an extenuating circumstance I must plead that I was never that sort of wistful infant who spent hour after hour lying face downwards on the hearthrug, which seems to have been practically the only position in which Grand Old Men could absorb literature during their limber boyhood; eagerly lapping up Gibbon and Carlyle and, in gauzier moments, the "Morte d'Arthur." Children in books always do their reading either prone on the hearthrug, or, should hearthrug be lacking, astride of the fork of an old apple tree. When the old apple tree, too, is lacking, I suppose they sit in a chair like the rest of us.

At the foot of the dining-room bookcase, then, I also read "Vice Versa," "Vanity Fair," and all the Works, I use the

capital with deliberate solemnity, and repeat it, all the Works of Bulwer Lytton. Mother had been asked by a gentleman who admired her (and their name was legion) to mention whatever she would like him to give her as a wedding-present—price no object, or words to that effect. The poor infatuate! After much thought (thus she related with pride whenever she found me reading “Harold” or “The Last Days of Pompeii”) Mother asked for the Works of Bulwer Lytton. One can be pretty sure that she often afterwards regretted that the pose of a fashionable intellectual overwhelmed her at a wrong moment, when she would so much rather have been given a prettily jewelled heart in diamonds and rubies. But of course I had to know both Mother and the Works of Bulwer Lytton a good deal better and from a maturer angle before I appreciated this touching anecdote. “Harold” and “The Last Days of Pompeii” were even from a parent’s point of view perfectly suitable because they were “historical”; the matter was far otherwise when I eagerly laid hold of “Night and Morning” and “Ernest Maltravers” and “The Two Gentlemen of Verona,” who were not nice gentlemen at all. Naturally I was interested in the books my parents read and talked about during my childhood; it must have seemed to me necessary to look at every one of them myself, to make sure it was all right for them. “The Marriage of William Ashe” by Mrs. Humphry Ward got rather confused in my mind with “Lady Adelaide” by Mrs. Henry Wood and “Lady Audley’s Secret” by Miss Braddon. And a book called “A Marriage of Convenience,” translated from the French, somehow found its way onto my nursery bookshelves: I have never known why; stricter supervision would hastily have whipped it out and carried it downstairs again and locked it up. At one period, Mother and Father talked in low murmurs about Oscar Wilde’s “De Profundis”; so low

were the murmurs that I was sure it must be an entrancing story; years later I bought a pirated paper copy in the street for twopence, and bound it in chintz. I wonder why I bound it in chintz? "The Green Carnation" amused me, though I had not realised it was a parody by a brilliant young man called Robert Hichens, and read it entranced as a straightforward narrative. Henry Seton Merriman was popular then, and it was a joke of the early nineteen hundreds to refer to "Barlasch of the Guard" as "Eyelash of the Guard." And "Elizabeth and Her German Garden" and "The Solitary Summer." When the author of these, five years ago, took me for a delightful picnic in the snow in the South of France (they are so seldom all together, the snow and the South and Elizabeth, that I felt I was one up on Browning), I was suddenly able to disconcert her with long quotations from her first novels about a similar picnic by the frozen Baltic.

Father's favourite novelist was W. J. Locke. "Ah," he used to say to me, not unkindly but in all sincerity, long after I had started writing, "When you can write like Locke, *then* you'll be worth reading." Idolising my father, I did my best to please him; and managed, I think, in my first two or three books, to imitate a great deal of Locke's whimsicality, though not his peculiar charm. Many years later, when I stayed in the South of France, I was able to hobnob quite happily with Wells, Maugham, Aldous Huxley and P. G. Wodehouse, and while certainly not fit to black their boots I still did not see why I should not sit down to table with them; but my father's influence was still so strong after his death that, though I knew W. J. Locke also lived somewhere in the neighbourhood, awe and reverence would not allow me to seek personal contact. He died, and I mourned for him as my father would have mourned.

Again skipping a few years, I met a lady at a dinner-

party in London, and, not catching her name, did not pay much attention when she kept assuring me how Will had loved my books and kept them beside his bed, and how she wished he were alive and present at this meeting. At first I thought “Will” was merely the equivalent of “my sister” during lecture tours in America; for numbers of my audience used to come up to me afterwards and be introduced, and nearly always their first words were a shy “My sister just loves your books, Miss Stern,” so that I could not help wondering why “my sister” had not come to the lecture instead of *her* sister. To revert to “Will,” politeness at last prompted me to ask who he was; and the answer—But you will have guessed. “He so wanted to know you; and when he heard you were on the Riviera I used to say to him, ‘Then why don’t you write to her, Will, and ask her to lunch?’ But he would say, ‘Oh, she won’t care to know an old foggy like me.’”

This is certainly a sad story.

The Apocrypha and “The Swiss Family Robinson” (I swear the link is accidental) also belong vividly to my childhood; then came a bewildered transition stage from Lamb’s “Tales of Shakespeare” to the dramatist unexpurgated, when I wondered which had gone wrong in the story, Shakespeare or Charles-and-Mary? And Kingsley’s “Heroes” accompanied by Charles Robinson’s swirling illustrations to make Perseus and Jason even more attractive. I lost a dollar once to Mr. Somerset Maugham over whether or not Perseus arrived on Pegasus to rescue Andromeda. My memory of the picture in “Heroes” showed him transported by the Sandals of Swiftness lent by Hermes to Pallas Athene, and passed on to Perseus without asking (a most reprehensible action). As the argument sprang up in the train between New York and South Carolina, we had to wait for settlement till we arrived at Mr. Nelson Doubleday’s home; there the Classical Dictionary ig-

nored my Kingsley and gave cold judgment in favour of Mr. Maugham, who unchivalrously pocketed the dollar.

When I was a child, two weekly journals came regularly to our house, both now defunct: *Black and White* and the *Ladies' Pictorial*. I looked on these as mine before they were Mother's, especially the *Ladies' Pictorial* which had a Children's Page and competitions. (And what could Mother want with all those fashion pictures? she who already had a wardrobe almost approaching Queen Elizabeth's famous three hundred and sixty-five dresses and begin fresh the next year?) My prize in a competition was a bound volume of the *Sunday at Home*, with a serial called "In the Days of Calvin," about Geneva and a boy called Norbert de Caulaincourt who was Calvin's ardent young disciple. Thanks to this, I am still, whenever Calvin is mentioned, less vague in my history than usual; though my conceit has been somewhat tempered by a piece of information from my young secretary, not five minutes ago, that he often preached on right drainage and the extermination of rats. A story in Kipling's "Rewards and Fairies" is also deeply knowledgeable about the extermination of rats as a cause of plague. How much more often are wise men practical than is usually acknowledged! So-called practical men (like Mr. Wilcox in "Howards End") enjoy pretending in a burly robust style that genius must be helpless until the plumber comes, cheery and late. Mark Twain's "The Prince and the Pauper," I read eagerly before I had any doubt that everything in print must be true. It related with gusto how the first few weeks of the reign of the boy king Edward VI were just a bit tumbled and funny because he had changed places with a gutter-urchin who resembled him and they could not get a chance to change back in time for little Edward the impostor to say in which drawer he had slung the Great Seal after he had cracked nuts with it. I thought then,

puzzled, only of seals that were alive, and did not know that the Great Seal is so important that because of it and to this day the Lord Chancellor is not allowed to leave the country during office (“Here, old man, hold this for me for a fortnight while I run across to the Engadine; only don’t put it down even during lunch because you’ve got to feel Trim-mensely Responsible”).

While still in my late teens, I was asked to supply a story for a juvenile Patriotic Reader. “Patches of Red,” I called it; and it was all about a little Boer boy who was sent to school in England and learnt that all patches of red were British territory, and fought for England against the Boers in 1900, and was wounded and bled for England—you perceive the big thrill which so subtly stressed the title twice—and recovered and married an English girl and lived happily ever after. I hope it did no lasting harm to the children who were led to browse on Readers. For they do leave traces, as lasting as those out of juvenile historical fiction; I read all about the Dead Sea in one of them when I was probably about eight, and in consequence scraps of information about the Dead Sea still occupy suburbs of my brain, together with bits about Calvin and Edward VI, and bits from “Before Antwerp” by Evelyn Everett Green; a fascinating account of a Flemish family of youngsters in Antwerp—with the usual English cousin thrown in to make it all seem better—during its siege by the Spanish Prince of Parma. “Days of Bruce,” by Grace Aguilar, cleared up obscure Scottish history even before I came to Scott; and “The Oak Staircase” still makes it impossible for me to drive through Taunton without imagining the school where the Maids of Taunton worshipped the handsome Duke of Monmouth and embroidered for him a banner in blue and gold, and suffered for it when cruel Judge Jeffreys came to the town to hold his Assizes after the

Rebellion. That was, I am sure, a well-written and vivid story, though ungratefully I forget the author's name; the heroine married a boy of fourteen when she was twelve, and only afterwards was sent to school; I was myself a school-girl when I read it, shielded by the lid of the desk during the history class when a Weak mistress had replaced a Strong mistress. Perhaps (I reflected in a rather bothered way), perhaps I ought to be thinking of getting married. I should not have been such a fool had not my father frequently reminded me that in the Orient girls got married before they were—well, whatever age I happened to be whenever he said it. Then he would burst into a shout of laughter at my guilty expression; but even then I was not wholly reassured, and I thought it hard that when I *did* get engaged (for three days) at the age of sixteen Father suddenly deserted the Orient idea, and went about twinkling and blowing out his cheeks and calling, "Where's the bride?" All very well, but it was only to please him that I had accepted the offer.

It is exasperating, the way that almost every historical book one read as a child, when nowadays recalled, seems to be an ironic comment on our present somewhat overdone privilege of being alive to witness the making of history. One of my very favourite books was the Dutch classic for children, "Hans Brinker, or the Silver Skates." From this fascinating tale I absorbed like pills in jam a first-class education in the customs of Holland, the geography of Holland, the history, art and literature of Holland, and, most useful of all, perhaps, on the typical Dutch outlook as it appeared to that English boy who (of course) was on a visit there to his cousins. I determined then, and went on determining, that I would go to Holland as soon as circumstances made it possible, and would make a frightful scene at every canal corner unless I found all the bits and pieces which the author of "Hans Brinker" had

made so familiar; but this happened and that happened and things happened, postponing the trip. I flew over Amsterdam and came down at the aerodome but merely for lunch, on my way to Denmark, and said to myself, “Next year at tulip-time it *shall* be Holland”; and in 1939, when I had the date fixed, and tulip-time and all the treasures of The Hague and Leyden and Haarlem and Amsterdam and Rotterdam were only a few days beyond my grasp, Mother suddenly collapsed into her last illness.

And in tulip-time of 1940, I did not go either.

I first came to stay in Brambleford four days before war broke out (not the Great War but this war—the Little War, as it were). Autumn had decided to do its poignant-irony act, its aching-nostalgia act; you remember the weather, the uncharted, unradioed, un-Greenwiched weather, during that September, October and November of 1939? Since living on a hilltop above the Italian Mediterranean for six years, I had gone to the other extreme and lived in London for eight years at a focal point of Bond Street, Regent Street, and Piccadilly. For two or three months every summer I had stayed in the South of France; twice I went to New York and California; three times, at Easter and Christmas and again Christmas, to the Island of Skye; twice to Copenhagen; and long week-ends staying with friends in Sussex, in Essex, in Kent and in Hampshire, in Wiltshire and in the Cotswolds. Yet though I was not by any means immured in brick and stone, nevertheless I lived in the heart of London. So this was my first autumn when (because of the War) I woke every day in a cottage room of white walls and uneven floors, and a ceiling supported by thick wavy beams. One of my windows looked out onto the acacia tree and the road and the cottage opposite and the pleasant rustic life of Brambleford, the other onto a garden gaily painted with flowers and in the middle of the

grass a round apple tree with huge round red apples crowded on the boughs and weighing them down into a circle—a pre-Raphaelite tree and a pre-Raphaelite autumn, an autumn of starlings and rooks, of swallows for ever wheeling restlessly in rehearsal of their flight to the Mediterranean and to Africa and the South. I used to stand still and watch them, from the country road which had the green line of the downs curving across ploughed fields at one side of it, and an irregular hedge of red berries and bright chestnut trees on the other, and I remembered the chapter of “The Wind in the Willows” where Ratty unsuccessfully tried to persuade the swallows to remain just for one autumn and winter in England and see how they liked it (autumn and winter, he pleaded, had their own homely pleasures and delights, here on these very downs and by these very streams); for I was on my way, more often than not, to visit that friend of mine who lives in the very house in which Kenneth Grahame wrote “The Wind in the Willows.” Ratty, though essentially English, was himself catching the infection of travel and longing to go south, which was the true reason why he hoped that if he could persuade the swallows to remain and settle down, then his own wander-fever would also subside into rich autumn contentment; but while they kept on wheeling about like this it made it all very difficult.

I sympathised with Ratty, though, unlike most people, I am never so afraid of autumn as of spring; my panic had been always for the lengthening days: I cannot tell why, unless it was the dread lest yet another summer should arrive and not be perfect. It mattered more that the summer should be perfect, than the winter; summer seemed to demand it more imperiously. So, lenient to the swallows (“If you must go, you must, and there’s an end of it; it takes all sorts to make a world and we can’t all think alike—though don’t

blame *me* if Egypt and Africa and all the rest of your Cheap Mediterranean Cruise don't come up to the advertisements this time”), I rounded the corner by the elms and the 1902 bench; and there in a garden was another pre-Raphaelite tree, hundreds of starlings gathering and flying into it from all sides till the whole tree seemed alive or like a chattering waterfall. Then suddenly, as though at an invisible signal, hundreds of birds were flying out, so that it seemed as though the whole tree were flying. Sometimes you get these miraculous effects and surprises, simply by being shortsighted. I once happened to look out of my window in London, and saw, on the roof of the military tailor opposite, three small dark figures working perilously near the edge; and quite suddenly they all took off and flew straight into space across Savile Row and into the sky. The shock to my nervous system was grave and might have proved fatal. It was with the same sort of amazement that I saw what looked like a large black lace mantilla flung over a field of stubble, lifted by the wind, and fly round three times, and subside again over the same field; then rise again and spread into thinner and thinner black lace. “Fieldfare,” remarked the man walking beside me.

September, October, November; by November, the hips and haws and holly that spotted the hedges down every road and lane were a more brilliant scarlet than even the oldest inhabitant could remember in previous autumns; the elms stood in pale shining yellow, tall against the blue wave of the distant downs; the last rough sweet-smelling chrysanthemums filled every garden with reddish purple and pale pink; an old gardener stood shaking a tree for what it would bring down about his head; and the orchard apples still ungarnered were not scarlet but golden green, flooded and transfigured by the sunshine till they looked a little too lucent and unreal, and I had to murmur, “Apples of the Hesperides” (though

not quite sure if these legendary apples had been oranges?). Leaves lay in every clear rain-coloured brook and stream which dived under the roads and paths of Brambleford, bordered the gardens, disappeared and reappeared, so that every stroll might have its lovely watery accompaniment.

And this special autumn the sound of water and the flight of birds were strangely blended with another sound and another flight which after a week or two adapted itself to ear and eye, till you felt it was inevitable that an aeroplane should be winging across the sky, or three or ten aeroplanes. It is not only by its smell and its noise that a motor-car spoils the beauty of the country. Even the most stream-lined of these somehow interrupts the views you love, and never adapts itself. But aeroplanes are different. If you could forget their sinister message, all through that autumn of 1939, you felt a surge of what was oddly like triumph at the sight of every tilt and angle of their flight. It was exhilarating that a machine made by man to imitate the flight of birds and hurled by man across the sky from end to end of the downs, should have acquired such felicitous strength and grace; achieved a union with the slope of every hill, with the shadow and the cloud and the rays that slanted in straight hard shafts from the sun through an iron pewter sky. The aeroplane, tiny and distinct, belongs to these; it neither clashes with them nor spoils them, yet, leaning against the sky, lends a sharpness to meadow and farm, cornfield and snug village with thatched roofs, a sharpness which they lacked before; beauty appears in austerity instead of beauty diffused in warm haphazard charm; we are given a queer illusion of seeing plane and landscape and sky represented in modern art or poster, rather than in the reality of the subject itself which might presently form a modern picture or poster. The truth may be that aeroplanes are not yet a reality in the same sense as earth and tree and river and

fields of growing barley, and in the sense that old thatched farms and cottages have adapted themselves to that same rooted and inevitable quality. Aeroplanes are still a fantasy until they come to ground. A lark soaring above the downs and an aeroplane soaring above the downs, both can inspire great poetry; but the lark, in spite of Shelley, is without doubt a created reality, while the aeroplane by paradox seems still a fair shape of the imagination. We will see whether the aeroplane in motion (though never the motor-car) will presently inspire as much poetry as ships at sea or even trains that pass in the night; ships after they have reached harbour continue their loveliness, and so does the skylark after it has dropped into the corn; but not the 'plane on the tarmac; nor, indeed, a pony in the drawing-room.

If you wonder how I know about this latter item, here is the answer: I was visiting some friends in a charming converted farmhouse not far from Brambleford; we drove down a lane thickly spotted with coral spindleberries; I have never seen spindleberries so lavish and so accessible, though for years I have looked on them, for no reason except the mystery of spiritual annexation, as having some special significance towards myself; whenever I see a spindle bush in full berry (does that sound strange? it does a little, and yet in full fruit, in full flower, so why not carry it on?), I am compelled to believe that it announces good news; not, of course, newspaper news, but a flash of enlightenment just about to break. This might have been true of a single miraculous spindleberry bush seen once in Sussex, high and out of reach; but there was not enough good news in the world to account for this heavenly mass-production of spindleberries in autumn, 1939. Feeling that they had slightly cheapened themselves (like young girls of whom our mothers warned us), I decided not to pick an armful, for they would be too sure to reverse the

fairy gold business, and lose their glory during the night, and turn into brass cents.

Next to the house was a paddock, and in the paddock I caught sight of a pony with the broadest back and the shortest legs of any quadruped I had ever seen. It looked, this pony, amiable and high-spirited, and (with that figure) most unlikely to marry. It was obviously looked upon as the family joke; for during the subsequent hour of lounging and tea my host suddenly suggested bringing it into the drawing-room. His beautiful young wife showed some slight distress, not quite enough to stop him; the other male present was tolerant of the idea. To me, however, the pony ceased to be funny as soon as it was among the furniture, though the two men, both soberly responsible and excellent at their jobs, were now relaxed and jovial and having a really good time. I wondered whether this arose from a reversion to boyhood and a boyish delight in possible injury and probable destruction—for you cannot have fat and active ponies in the drawing-room with impunity—or whether it was universal, this delight in the spectacle of two incongruous elements forcibly banged together. Or was it that fundamental stable-lad in nearly every masculine soul which gets the raffish upper hand once in a way and takes delight in upsetting the feminine sense of what is decorous and suitable? Anyhow, that absurd caricature of a pony spent about twenty minutes in our company at tea; and if all the spindleberries had been summoned together in coral-coloured orgy just to prepare me for this, then (as we frequently say of the laundry) I shall change and go somewhere else. I shall go home, and on my way gaze at two majestic barns joined by an archway; for under that archway, exactly posed in the centre, stands a white horse, motionless in profile against that brief shape of sky like a horse waiting to be made into a statue. That horse had been told, no doubt:

“My dear fellow, you’ve no idea how well you look, standin’ just there under the arch. Something *noble* about an archway, if you know what I mean? And then the dark walls of the barn throw up your colour so well. Believe me, you’re the right horse in the right place.”

Musing, therefore, on square pegs and spindleberries, ponies and archways and the boy in man and many other irrelevant but not unpleasant subjects, I strolled on, until I heard a voice floating through the air, and the voice cried: “Butcher, butcher, are you calling on me today?” Naturally I stopped; a cottage window near by was open, and the urgency of hope and expectation in the call told me that here was a new Mariana in her Moated Grange: “‘He cometh not,’ she said.” But a less defeatist Mariana than Shakespeare’s or Tennyson’s; for though it was half past six in the evening, and even the least ruthless butcher-butcher closes his doors at seven, still the cry went on: “Butcher, you *must* call on me today. O Butcher, why didn’t you call before? Butcher, butcher, where are you? Are you on your way?” Meaning, we must suppose, Is dinner on its way? Apparently she regarded the butcher to whom she so tragically appealed, as a two-in-one personality, one to answer the telephone, and the other already spanking smartly along the country roads with steaks and chops, saddles and sirloins, or maybe a bit of liver and a bit of an oxtail (“Oh, my ears and whiskers, how late it’s getting!”) I have already mentioned my Great-Aunt Elsa who used to carry on with the butcher in Portobello Road; this little lady in Brambleford, forty years on, had the same dimpled cushiony prettiness, the same arch femininity, and behind it, I have no doubt, the same fierce will-to-live. I should like to have seen them together with only one butcher between them.

These frivolous reflections so cheered me that when I ar-

rived back at my little hotel I had an impulse to be more like a ray of sunshine, and less like the sobbing small boy in "Misunderstood," than I had been for several days. So I tripped into the sitting-room and asked the three old ladies assembled there whether they would care for me to bring down my portable wireless to listen to the six o'clock news? I had heard something about a naval victory, I added, and we might as well get all the fun we could out of that. I smiled at them, and they smiled at me, and said courteously that it would be delightful, but wasn't it too much trouble? Pollyanna and Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm replied that it would be no trouble but a pleasure, and trotted upstairs to fetch the portable, and trotted down again beaming with good will and the desire to brighten the lives of others less fortunate than ourselves. (By which I must have meant, in my fatuous spindleberry mood, that it was in itself glorious to be forty-nine compared with seventy-nine.)

Only it was unlucky that switching it on, a few seconds late, these were the first words to fall upon the silent attentive atmosphere where the three ladies sat agog for their little treat: "*There will be two shillings more on the Income Tax.*"

I had forgotten that Sir John Simon was announcing his Emergency Budget that afternoon, and that at six o'clock would be the first intimation of our lack of immortality. The courteous old ladies bore it very well, and did not fail to thank me for my great kindness. But it was a Ray of Sunshine thoroughly quenched and cured that carried the wireless upstairs again.

And presently I had need for an evening stroll to cool down, and to remember that the Budget was one thing, and a line of green hill that curved softly in the evening light at the end of our road was quite another. Just by the elms and the 1902 bench, a group of small boys were playing some

complicated game of war in which they all were English troops, and the Germans were recruited from unknowing passers-by. The plod of rich Berkshire speech crisscrossed by high sharp cockney told me that here the evacuees were making themselves at home. One of them, who had been in residence with a friend of mine, had been formally introduced to me—a friendly urchin; often to my great surprise he would catch me up on a walk and stroll along beside me pouring out chatter which I think must have been more for his own entertainment than for mine, for it was neither relevant nor coherent, and only ended when he had deposited me at my own door. He knew me as the sick lady, and only as such was I an object of his interest; for at the beginning of the evacuation, while we were still able to take drives in her car, he had been told that when he sat at the back he must not sit and drum with his heels on the front seat because it did not agree with the sick lady. You have to have a focal point of interest for children. Once when I went down to visit a group of juvenile refugees, a miscellaneous collection scooped up from nearly every European country, I took with me my walking-stick that flashed an electric light when you carelessly twisted the top; the stick I called the Usherette's Terror, because they tossed their flaxen heads with such anger and contempt when in competition with their torch I used it to light my feet into a seat at the cinema. (The advantage of carrying one's own torch is that one knows the whereabouts of one's own feet and can therefore cast it in the right instead of in the wrong place.) This little band of refugees were learning to speak English fast, so I asked them if they were fond of reading, offering to provide some books. I could not give them all walking-sticks with electric lights at one end (mine was raising a clamour of popularity) because, as it ironically happened, this cheap make came from Germany. Quickly one

little dark boy with a thin olive face and enormous dark eyes replied eagerly: "Yes, we are all fond of reading but especially me, especially me, *besonders ich*," he repeated, tapping his own chest to make sure that I had got the idea. How sad that we must learn to suppress our natural selves as we grow up, instead of displaying them with the natural egoism of eight-year-old Franz! Most of us have an especially-me in our systems. Another little refugee, Hansie, whom we picked up from his school in the Cotswolds, and took for a long drive as a treat, showed symptoms of polite restlessness, and wherever we went kept on saying, "But *where* are we going?" Till at last, after we had visited all the most beautiful of the Cotswold villages, he cried out with a despairing but still polite: "But please, can we not go at least to Oxford? *wenigstens Oxford?*" And then I realised how natural characteristics will out, and that the German passion for visiting "at least Oxford," which had been duly labelled and underlined as a place of interest and instruction, was now bursting forth in Hansie.

I learnt with interest that the L.C.C. included among their rules for these refugee homes one delicious example from the "seen-something-nasty-in-the-woodshed" School of Thought: apparently girls and boys have to be separated not only into different dormitories but onto different floors *directly they are over one year old*.

On my return stroll in Brambleford, I heard the little London urchins, whose existence in Berkshire could hardly have been less strange than that of Hansie and Franz anywhere in England, doing a counting-out chant, in the middle of the road. In my juvenile days this chant was a decorous and even humane affair: "Eena, deena, dinah, doh, catch a nigger by his toe, if he hollers let him go, eena deena dinah doh." But these little brutes, still influenced by the colour

question, were counting out: “White baby, yellow baby, brown baby, black.” I had already been told that this was the rhythmic formula for cherry-stones now used in the junior school, not for what you were, apparently, but for what you were likely to receive. I investigated further into this matter, and discovered that the “Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor,” of my own early youth had also been brought up to date in accordance with the times, for whereas we had continued, “Rich Man, Poor Man, Apothecary, Thief” (I had always been surprised at the Elizabethan “Apothecary”), lately they count by, “Soldier Brave, Sailor True, Skilled Physician, Varsity Blue, Daring Airman, Squire So Hale, Handsome Actor, Curate Pale.” The Daring Airman and Handsome Actor had for alternatives Dashing Cowboy and Portly Rector. In each case I applauded the adjective, proving that the conventional idea still held throughout every generation that squires would always be hale and curates pale.

Even more than games, popular songs mark our passage from change to further change in morals, manners, transport and general amenities. (“Hullo, my baby” was the first telephone song and “A Bicycle Made for Two” ushered in a fashion which was to become sedate and old-fashioned, and then again, in revenge, a chief form of transport in a petrol-depleted world.) Listening to Uncle Mac and his niggers a few months before, down on the beach at Broadstairs, I was enchanted with the sentiments of a song shrilled by the kiddies. (“Come on, kiddies, sing up! *Now* the little girls, *now* the little boys! Sing up, you boys, we can’t let the little girls beat us!” But they always do, Uncle Mac, and they always will, in contests of this nature, for they don’t suffer from the same inhibitions.)

*"We're nice people, with nice manners,
But we've got no money at all.
We've got nice habits and we keep rabbits,
But we've got no money at all.
Our house is called The Towers,
Our garden's full of flowers,
And if we keep the payments up
In twenty years it's ours.
Oh, we're nice people, with nice manners,
But we've got no money at all."*

It was the frankness regarding the financial condition of these Nice People which enchanted me. When I was children—which is John van Druten's phrase to express a general state of affairs so much better than the individual when-I-was-a-child—when I was children, you never let it be known that you had no money at all; otherwise you were not Nice People. The Victorians would have been horrified at the frank, even chubby confessions that are taken for granted nowadays: "We're utterly broke. Down to the gums. Wallowing in overdraft—" "My dear, I haven't been solvent for eighteen months except for two days last April, and I spent that on a Li-lo and a perm."

*Our father keeps our mother,
Our mother keeps our brother,
And when we have no money,
We borrow from each other.*

Stated, you perceive, without embarrassment, and reflecting a perfectly congenial state of affairs in at least nineteen families out of twenty; deplorable, perhaps, but we *are* Nice People, let's face it, otherwise we would let each man shift

for himself. How attractive they are, this raffish improvident crew! Yet not so raffish, for they realise the importance of nice manners, a flower-garden, and no ostentation. Thank goodness that at least the last decade has rid us of any lingering traces of the *épergne* standard.

Yet frankness can be carried too far. When you meet the sort of man who seems after a cursory investigation to be an answer to prayer (the wrong sort of prayer) and so rare as to be almost extinct, and your exhilaration is dashed too suddenly when he says, “I’d so like you to meet my wife,” you should really *not* answer, “Oh, damn, must I?” or “Why, in heaven’s name?” as though you were Nature’s child. For nice people have nice manners. Yet how my heart approved of that moment in Noel Coward’s “Shadow Play” when Gertie Lawrence takes a farewell of the man with whom she has just sat out two dances, and, using the sweetest of smiles and the voice of enthusiastic politeness, says: “Good-bye, thank you so much. It’s been so boring.” This encounter, however, took place in a dream. Yet even in real life or in fairly real life (because it took place in Hollywood) I could not help relishing a letter from an actor and his wife, who had difficulty in finding rooms during an emergency, to their great friend—a letter which enshrined the phrase: “If the worst comes to the worst, we could always come and stay with you!” Their potential hostess (but only if the worst came to the worst) was slightly stunned by their simple childlike frankness, but when she came round she enjoyed it as I did, for I am bound to say it made me feel almost *too* well in the morning.

The generation which I have heard hastily but quite effectively described as “two lots back from now,” dealing with a situation or merely volunteering a remark, would usually make it polite and pleasant from a motive early planted in

them by a still earlier generation: that you must please men and therefore never be frank, or you will lose all chance of getting married. Jane Austen (but she was several lots back) did not subscribe to this code: her heroines, especially Elizabeth Bennet, were delightfully free from hypocrisy and often quite startling in the way they punctured the vanity of their admirers. Were they right or wrong? They all married; but Miss Austen herself remained Miss Austen. Did her careless saucy tongue run away with her once too often? "Lizzy," cried Mrs. Bennet, "remember where you are, and do not run on in the wild manner that you are suffered to do at home." It may have been unconscious wish-fulfilment in Jane, that Darcy and Knightley, plagued yet fascinated by the gay impetuous teasing manner of Elizabeth and Emma, eventually and in spite of it still came to the scratch. Mary Crawford, certainly, in "Mansfield Park," carried frankness a little too far and lost her Edmund. That was a curious scene shown us through Edmund's eyes in his later confession to Fanny: the scene when Mary Crawford sends for him to discuss the flight of her brother with his married sister, Mrs. Rushworth. Curious, I mean, that Jane herself was obviously shocked by Mary: "'I heard you were in town,' said she—'I wanted to see you. Let us talk over this sad business. What can equal the folly of our two relations?'"—I could not answer, but I believe my looks spoke. . . . Guess what I must have felt. To hear the woman whom—no harsher name than folly given! So voluntarily, so freely, so coolly to canvass it! No reluctance, no horror, no feminine—shall I say? no modest loathings!" Yet Jane was not in the least shocked when Fanny with her soft gentle tongue betrayed to Edmund that Mary's recent kindness to himself was quite certainly because Mary knew his elder brother was dangerously ill and he himself by that much nearer to the

title and estates. Could our exquisitely balanced author for once have been blinded by favouritism, that she allowed Miss Tender-hearted Fanny to come out puss-triumphant in the contest? And not only allowed, but rejoiced in it?

The battle of the generations has been the theme of innumerable plays. It adapts itself perfectly to stage treatment; depicting the conflict between grandparents, parents and children; leaping decades to show that the children of the first act are the parents of the second, and so forth, on the “child is father to the man” principle; not, as I once heard it scornfully reversed to make sense by a man who preferred literal statement: “The man is father to the child.” This must have been the same man who thought that Shakespeare must surely have meant “sermons in books, stones in the running brooks.” “The Breadwinner” laid an oddly different stress on the generations battle; “The Three Daughters of Monsieur Dupont” came to a loose cluster of bad ends; “Fanny’s First Play” and “You Never Can Tell” discussed the theme in the Shavian manner; Nora in “A Doll’s House” expressed it in what one dear old trout called a tarantula; and Ruth Draper can convey it while being all three generations herself.

Recently, however, a young dramatist has had the original idea of presenting two generations who were not even related, nor fussed up by Old Family Album traditions of grandparent, parent and child with a jolly seasoning of aunt and uncle to taste. His protagonists, overlapping with no more than fifteen or twenty years between them, dwelt therefore more or less in the same modern world; yet psychologically a swirl of rushing water divides them; because the older ones in their late thirties and early forties belonged to what we have almost learned to think of as the Lost Generation, fabulous as the unicorn: that post-last-war

band once notorious for their impenitent, twisted, careless, callous, hopeless, heartbreak-house quality, their nuisance quality. They went treasure-hunting, but they rarely found the treasure; they drove madly on a silly-go-round to parties, four at least every night, but the last no better than the first. A generation of farcical savages, tempting to a dramatist: Noel Coward displayed them in his song "Dance Little Lady" and his play "The Vortex"; Michael Arlen, in rather more ornate style in "The Green Hat," book, play and film; above all, Evelyn Waugh immortalised them for ever in "Vile Bodies," and "A Handful of Dust." Those absurd desperate touching creatures, infatuated with their own lack of heroism, he showed helpless as characters in ancient Greek drama, but boxed up in their decade of mediocre revelry. He revealed more compassion than hate in his portrayal of the grotesque situations into which they strayed; a born satirist does not allow himself either comment or surprise.

Reverting to the question of manners and candour, present-day youth goes neither to the extreme of volunteering pleasant untruths, nor to the other extreme of hurling unnecessary frankness; for their whole sense of values has altered, and it does not matter enough to them either way. Independent workers, ever so slightly priggish and scornful of their predecessors, they are financially free from the preoccupation of the late Victorians with the marrying technique, which is the same as the pleasing-men technique; nor do they need to bother with the Edwardian fierce rebellion to win their own rights; nor have they the queer sort of desperation of the post-last-war generation which threw good manners overboard as unnecessary ballast and could see no more in truth than as a wounding weapon brandished at random. For several years before September, 1939, it

appeared that present-day youth were realising more or less subconsciously that all their energy would soon be needed, not deliberately to please people, men or women, nor crudely to displease them, but to get through life at all. It may well be that they started preparing for war before our government. This is their heritage, straight through from those who had fought for a latchkey and a vote during the first fourteen years of the twentieth century—the “Ann Veronica,” the “Stand-up-to-Papa” brigade. But these broke away from home to save their own live souls, even while Papa could still provide security and a solid future in return for submission and obedience. They made their choice; and during the storm interval between two wars, it became clearer and clearer that it was as well they had made it then and made it rightly, for later it would have been Hobson’s choice: later, Papa was bankrupt and could offer no solid future. It was just as well that the children of his children, by the rebellion of an intermediate generation, should be ready to face a state in Europe which might well have caused Diogenes to place the largest order on record for a consignment of tubs and lanterns.

I was brought to realise, however, that, though I had reached a conclusion that our modern youth might well be the salt of the earth, this must be taken with a pinch of the same salt, and where an older generation had once declared that the youngsters know nothing, can do nothing, and must be trusted with nothing, so are they nowadays inclined to exaggerate the idiocy and helplessness of their parents. Omnipotence reversed. The eternal clash between mother and daughter still goes on, though now it is not based on whether the daughter should have her freedom, but whether the mother should have any claims or remain a nitwit who can-

not possibly know even what is good for herself, let alone for her daughter.

From Dashiell Hammett's "The Thin Man":

"When she had finished he grimaced impatiently: 'That's silly. Mamma's not really dangerous. She's just a case of arrested development. Most of us have outgrown ethics and morals and so on. Mamma's just not grown up to them yet.' He frowned and corrected himself thoughtfully: 'She might be dangerous, but it would be like a child playing with matches.'"

It is easier to be without a sense of generation if you have no children of your own; intelligence and broadmindedness seem to jar to a sudden halt, when mother and daughter face each other with flashing eyes and dilated nostrils. I had been encouraged to hope that I knew quite a lot about the claims of both sides, for in at least three cases I have had the privilege of being the friend of both. If I am honest I must admit that we are liable to be a little biased on the side of youth because we are a little flattered that youth should treat us, though of their mother's age, as more or less of an equal, or at any rate as a person with a glimmering of understanding when the case is passionately explained to us. Not that confidences really have much to do with "older" or "younger"; it may be brutal to say so, but I am convinced they work out often at a question of whether you both happen to be alone in an appropriate place with the right amenities and if the lighting be sympathetic.

Nevertheless, any complacence I might have won because of my friendship with three or four babes and sucklings, was rudely shattered on a certain day when, after hobnobbing with a great friend who was nevertheless, if not quite a babe and suckling nearly twenty years younger than myself, I accompanied her on a visit to the lady whom I had

hitherto treated negligently but nicely as just being “Caroline’s mother”; and she startled me, after the first greetings, by a heartfelt: “Now tell me, Peter, what *are* we to do with our mothers?” *Our* mothers? Luckily I did not exclaim, “But you can’t *have* a mother—you *are* a mother,” because I reminded myself just in time that she was only my senior by about ten years, and had as much right to the possession of a mother as myself. I also reminded myself of the literal use of that inimitable American idiom “Aw, be your age!” Judging, however, from American literature, to which I am a thirsty addict, it is more often used to cover acute confusion and scarlet embarrassment. If you thank somebody profusely, he will mutter, “Aw, be your age!” and bury his face in a chocolate sundae. The old gentleman with the long white beard who claps “to show he believes in fairies” is not quite being his age—unless he should be Rip Van Winkle at the end of his unnatural doze.

I have accused myself of vanity in my dealings with the very young generation; I will now take that back, for it only occurred when, a split personality of Customs Official and passenger, I searched myself for the contraband motive and found it. That mood is now over; we cannot afford it too often. Mr. Toad in “The Wind in the Willows” slapped his chest after a period of momentary honesty and said: “I am an animal again!” The word “chiseller” occurred so frequently in Hollywood (“You watch out, he’s a chiseller”) that I was surprised when I heard it used in England: not but chiselling is universal, particularly in the abstract, when it amounts to the same thing as “rationalising” in the jargon of the psychoanalyst. Subconsciously you chisel away at an aspect of yourself or your actions, till you like yourself better than you did. Papa and Mamma in Butler’s “Way of All Flesh” were chisellers A-1 Copper-bottom (my

father's favourite term of approbation, and therefore faithfully imitated by me at an incredibly early age when copper-bottom seemed nothing to do with Lloyd's insurance of ships, but was part of the anatomies of Ten Little Nigger-boys).

What a picture of family life Butler gave us in his "Way of All Flesh"—as blood-curdling as Edgar Wallace, as terrifying as Dante's "Inferno," and nevertheless as purely funny as P. G. Wodehouse or "Mourning Becomes Electra" (according to taste). When we compare the straightforward mentality by which most parents today deal with their offspring at all ages, with the hypocrisy by which Theobald and Christina badgered their bewildered young, we get some idea of what civilisation has done for us, as well as what it has undone. My own education in youth and girlhood was slung somewhere halfway between those two phases; nearer the sense of today than the nonsense of yesterday, but with lacunæ that were the cause of frequent absurd situations where I acted more than absurdly.

That episode, for instance, of the Devonshire squire, the forgotten collar, the hotel at Brighton, and the "Maid o' the Mist."

I was I think, an unsophisticated twenty, very seriously engaged to be married to a young man on whom my father glowered, regarding him emphatically as neither A-1 nor copper-bottom, but, on the contrary, unstable as water and most unlikely to excel either as a husband or as an electrical engineer. My father's sentiments of dislike and suspicion were heartily reciprocated. My fiancé (Tony, I will call him, as I called him when I wrote of our tragic history in my first novel) had confessed to me, when we first got engaged, that he had a mistress; or rather, that he had had one; but that of course now she was deader than dead mutton as far as he was

concerned. Nobly I stretched my tolerance, my knowledge of men and women and the world, to its non-elastic limits, and forgave him. Betrothal, confession and forgiveness all happened rather dramatically down at Eastchurch on the Isle of Thanet, where he had taken me to see my first flying display. He and a friend shared between them a rickety-looking little aeroplane at which I gazed in awe when escorted to the hangar, hoping I should never have to see him go up in it. It is a little superfluous to state here, however grimly and unsentimentally, that during the War of 1914-18 he was decorated for his skill in obtaining aerial photographs of enemy trenches, and crashed to his death in the last month before the armistice.

Nevertheless, on that particular day, aeroplanes were no more than a fantastic side-line, and had (I thought) nothing whatever to do with real life as I was then destined to live it.

Now let us take up the story at quite a different place.

When I was sixteen I sprang out of bed in the middle of the night because I was Inspired to write a poem; we must spell “inspired” with a capital *I* because I gather this is the way all splendid poetry should be written, shivering with alternate cold and heat, while a solitary candle flickers in competition with the dawn. Well, this was the first and last time, in fact the only time that I have ever had the inspiration to get up and write poetry in the middle of the night. It was a long narrative poem called “Maid o’ the Mist,” and described in irregular rhyming metres and in the first person how a young monk with a temperament had been sent to ride across the moors one stormy night in search of a doctor (presumably during a flu epidemic at the monastery) and already a bit feverish, met what the Americans call alternatively a skirt, a dame or a Jane, but which he and I called his Maid o’ the Mist. He chased her on a mad gallop till he (and his horse, I

suppose, though by then I must have forgotten the horse) crashed into an old disused mine; just as he lay a-dying, the Maid o' the Mist in her coy tantalising way hovered about him and then surrendered to a hearty hug and kiss. I was extremely proud of my poem, and even a little frightened of it, not having known until then that I had such depths of passion concealed about my person.

Let us leap four years.

Now it happened that my sister, when she married and went to live in the country, had been adopted by a hard-bitten, fast-ridin', easy-goin', swearin', huntin', boxin' set: nice warm-hearted hospitable people. They did not read; they did not read *at all*. Their leader, a pleasant tough whom I will call Harry, had run away with his wife while they were both still at school, and they had spent a honeymoon on Dartmoor. Perhaps my sister was conscious of some analogy between their behaviour and my poem, "Maid o' the Mist"; or perhaps she merely thought that Harry would be interested in any good huntin' that happened across a moor. Anyhow, she showed him that poem I had written four years earlier, and he developed an *idée fixe* about it; to him it was just the only poem in the world. Whenever we met he used to make me recite it, and listen with his usually mobile face set and fascinated. The climax came when he and his wife invited me down to Brighton for a week at Christmas to stay with them at a sporting luxury hotel, well-known for its dashing clientèle, a clientèle which half England would have called "fast" with a disapproving inflection, and the other half with an inflection of deepest envy.

Every night in the crowded lounge while people sat relaxed over their coffee, their brandies and cigars, Harry would enjoin silence, and then make me rise and recite "Maid o' the Mist."

I think this statement is better left bare and undecorated. It is of little use, thirty years later, to describe my feelings. Harry was popular and generous; in the words of his pals, “a good sport and one of the best.” Most of the guests at Dean’s Hotel knew him well; the manager was a close friend of his and thought him a good sport, too, and one of the best. This may explain why nobody rose and brained first him and then me, in order of responsibility; besides, I think everybody was slightly hypnotized with astonishment. You will be wondering why I did not refuse to undergo this fiery trial night after night. But by then I was not any more the pert confident flapper who had spent Christmas six years ago in cheap and gaudy enjoyment of the festival programme at a Brighton Hydro; I was going through a much shyer, more self-conscious, more sensitive stage: this man was my host, I was his guest, privileged to stay in these brilliant surroundings; I could not refuse my host. I might plead with him, but it was little use pleading with a blank spot and a glazed look. Over anything else, the easy-going Harry would have yielded in a moment, but *not*, by Jove, over the little matter of reciting “Maid o’ the Mist.” If others after a hard day’s sport in the open air and an excellent dinner, did not draw the same exquisite delight from hearing me that he did himself, that was their loss, or they could go elsewhere. As to that, I suppose a few of them did steal away like Arabs when the word went round that I was to be unleashed again; but it looked as though the greater part of my audience remained incredulous, from one night to another, whether the agony had really happened or could ever happen again.

Among the people staying there was a Devonshire squire, all the traditional manor-house business plus trimmings; tall and handsome with a Savile Row cut to his clothes (though then I knew nothing of Savile Row, nor that I should one

day live for eight years with windows that commanded a view of it from end to end). This man satisfied every fastidious instinct passed on to me from my three Rakonitz uncles. He must have been nearly twice my age, and though not the tough type himself, he could make himself at home in the Harry atmosphere or in any other. He looked at me a good deal, but I thought that might easily be because of "Maid o' the Mist," until Harry's wife informed me that he had fallen headlong in love with me, and that I was the girl above all others whom he would like to marry. Just as I was swooning with incredulous pleasure, for nobody could deny that this was most cheerful news for a girl who had formed a romantic attachment from afar, Mrs. Harry added: "But I told him it was quite hopeless because you were engaged already."

Dear woman! Yet how was she to know that by then the boy-and-girl infatuation was over on both sides, though Tony and I were faithfully trying to pretend it was not. He found his engagement irksome; I found his exactions irritating, and his failure to handle my father properly, and the way he was always landing me in some scrape or other, and his youthful harangues on casting off the swaddling-clothes of old-fashioned virginity. What I needed, of course, was an older man with stability (oh, my prophetic father!); a man who would take responsibilities instead of first creating them, and then handing them over with a "Here, you hold this for a moment!" and finally forgetting to take them back again. What I needed, in fact, was the Devonshire squire with his forty stalwart years and his mature humorous outlook; and his manor-house, which I am sure would have had the same effect on me as Darcy's Pemberley on Elizabeth Bennet. Nevertheless, as manners forbade me to say "No" to Harry when he made me recite every evening, so faithfulness for-

bade me to play the jilt: I belonged to Tony for ever and for ever; just as Tony belonged to me for ever and for ever. Nor had I any presentiment, every time I reminded myself firmly I must not break his heart, that Tony had ceased languishing for his mistress, and was telling her, as he switched off the light, that he was going to make a clean breast of it (the second) to his little fiancée when he went down, by Harry's invitation, to spend Christmas Eve at Brighton. The agitation of these impending clean breasts affected his packing, so that arriving late for dinner, he only discovered when he was nearly dressed that he had brought no collar. The shops were all shut; his host was already downstairs at dinner; he knew nobody in the hotel; and, like myself, he had not yet the right equipment to deal with social quandaries. He judged that the best thing to do was to wear his stiff day collar with white tie and tails, and to stroll into the dining-room looking both cool and sagacious and as though nothing were amiss. Looking as though nothing were amiss is the best possible course of behaviour for moral and spiritual problems; but it fails to work with collars, especially when the face is flushed and damp from struggle. At the next table to ours sat the Devonshire squire with three other men, he the most distinguished among them. He smiled wryly at the sight of my very young fiancé. If the smile was meant to express that he would do a bargain with the devil to swop his forty years for Tony's twenty-three, collar and all, then he can have had little sense of his own strong attractions. That collar, with Tony's chubby face above it wearing a conceited expression, was simply the last straw. Had I been more mellow myself, I should have known that the conceited expression was a manly effort to carry it off and was meant to be debonair, not conceited; or had I not had a week of reciting ‘‘Maid o' the Mist’’ every night in the great lounge of a fashionable hotel, I might

have been touched more to tenderness than impatience. But my nerves were jagged, and I reflected if only Tony were not so devoted, I could break it off and marry *him*. I danced with the squire, and I danced with Tony and his collar, and then I danced with the squire again. He spoke of Tony in a spirit of rueful resignation, and he gave me the dark red carnation that he wore. Of course he said no word of his passion: how could he, when I was engaged? He had probably been told by Mrs. Harry (damn her) that I was madly in love with my early choice. Scarcely able to see for glamour and sacrifice and anguish, I sat out the next waltz with Tony, who then confessed to me that he had broken his promise and gone back to his mistress. I remained silent, a blend of indignation and joy (and real surprise) singing in my ears. Tony went on defiantly; it was altogether his fault, he said; he was a cad, he said; he was a swine, he said, his language getting stronger, but all the same if I hadn't been quite so chilly, so proper, so intolerant, he said so well-brought-up, so old-fashioned, so clinging to tradition, so father-ridden, so innocent and unwilling to be instructed, so blasted young—

This from him, in that collar! We broke off our engagement in a heated quarrel with nothing beautiful said on either side. I did not go back to the ballroom; I went to bed and cried over smashed idols, the perfidy of young men, and my bounteous good luck that it should all come so right in the end.

The next morning I went to Mother and Father for the rest of Christmas, as stipulated. They were also staying in Brighton, but not by any means at Dean's. It was wildly important that the squire, who less than a week ago had said that I was the only girl for him, should hear that now I was free and could be. I had no desire that he should hear it from Mrs. Harry, that unconscious wrecker of happiness; and my

curious juvenile code of chumperry decreed that I should not write the letter of letters until the squire and I were no longer under the same roof. I cannot imagine how I thought of these niceties, these delicate fine shadings of conduct. I wrote to him from my parents' hotel, while I was supposed to be dressing for dinner, and left the letter anonymous (again Heaven knows why, because the whole point seemed to be that he should know from whom it came). Hastily snatching up a wrap, as we novelists say, I slipped out into the icy air and down to the pillar-box; excitement kept me hot, and the feeling that I was doing something bold and unmaidenly which yet had to be done if I were ever to be happy again. I looked down at the dark crimson carnation I was wearing; hesitation was over; I posted the letter, and *not* into a vase of potpourri either. When I returned, my father met me in the hall, and said, hurt and cross: "Couldn't it wait?" He thought I had been writing to my unstable fiancé. Never mind, he would like my squire much better.

But my squire had left the hotel. I shall never know if he went because of my letter, or before he ever received it. I never heard from him. That episode of my life was over; from beginning to end it had been *too* hot-making. (I thank thee, Waugh, for teaching me that word.)

There is one other word, however, to sum up that Brighton Christmas of my thwarted agony. A few years ago I wrote a poem called "Quandary." It appeared in *Punch*. Actually it was conceived as a parody of a certain obscure tendency in modern poetry. I wrote it in circumstances very like those in which I had written "Maid o' the Mist": in the middle of the night. But this time I did not leap out of bed, because I had a very bad cold and I had had hot whisky and rum and everything was too comfortable. Yet possibly when we take into account this "Maid o' the Mist" and me reciting it in

the lounge of Dean's Hotel, and my passion for an older, better man while I was still betrothed to one more juvenile and foolish, and if we remember, further, my fiancé and his collar and his mistress, and do not forget that I had been taught that no nice girl made herself too cheap-and-easy for her importunate lover before marriage; and if finally, leaving my quandary and Tony's quandary, we go to the squire's quandary on receiving an anonymous letter of wild and woolly wording, then you will agree, perhaps, that this is the right place to insert my poem, so that you can read it in a serious spirit:

QUANDARY

*Down in the dim weeds
Swayed and crossed by the glutinous ten thousand years,
We struggled, met;
Rude searchlights raying that dirigible agony
So ecumenically worth while.
See then, love, here's my dilemma;
Yours, too.
If you can believe that one tremor sent twirling up
(Spiral traitor to the monocotyledon Me)
Is yet what thirty-three-and-a-third æons hence from the
deep-rooted now,
Still my gaping fish's heart
Bladdered
Shredded
Under that thin left fin,
Portcullis between next and last—
Yet hardly portcullis,
Since in harsh mute Linnean singing,
Still I hear*

Your thwarted reassurances

(Hush, my striped Zebra, Hush!)

Telling me I am the intrinsic you,

*But so concealed beneath your pachydermatous defences
That it's not much good worrying, anyhow!*

A little Christmas present stands on my dressing-table, reminding me (oddly) of New York. Oddly, because it is an angel about three inches high, an orthodox little blue and white painted angel, carrying a tiny candle nearly burnt out. It happened that I had a bad fit of homesickness a few days before Christmas; quite unexpected, for I love New York. Perhaps it was the sight of all the Father Christmases shivering outside every shop up and down the length of Fifth Avenue, ringing dinner-bells and trying to match blue-pinked noses with a festive and rubicund greeting to each hurrying passer-by. The year before, I had spent the best Christmas of my life in the South of France, with golden oranges hot in the sun, growing in rows on the villa terraces. I should rather have oranges in rows than Santa Clauses, though this New York parade was, I think, a charitable stunt to collect for the poor. At any rate, spinning along Fifth Avenue in a taxi with a young Southerner, I yearned for Cap-Ferrat, while he yearned for Kentucky; a rich feast of yearning, but we agreed that we could do it even more intensely on that day, next Wednesday, when we should presumably both be feeling worse. He promised, therefore, though he could not definitely name a time, to come in and see me on Christmas Day, and he would tell me more of what it would have been like had he been at home in Kentucky, and I would tell him more of what it had been like a year ago in a villa on the Mediterranean. The programme was not quite so luscious for him as for me, because he would be only listening to an Eng-

lish accent, whereas I had the pleasure of hearing, while he spoke, one of the most charming voices in the world, the slow sweet drawl of the true Southerner. I went to bed just after midnight on Christmas Eve, and fell asleep quickly. Then the hotel telephone rang close beside my ear, waking me to that sudden sure knowledge of catastrophe which comes from too sudden awakening by bell or knocker. The hotel clerk informed me that a gentleman was waiting to see me (the police, of course). With chattering teeth, I asked for his name, just to make sure. It was my Southern friend. "Yes, send him up." I looked at my watch: twenty minutes past two; yes, it was Christmas *Day*; the lad had kept his word; it had not occurred to Larry's innocent confidence in his welcome that any one time might be less suitable than any other. I put on a fur coat and fur slippers, and went to the door of my sitting-room. There he was, walking towards me along the corridor in the dark, but holding a tiny angel, who in turn was holding a tiny lighted candle. Here in New York with its famous blazing Great White Way, with its millions of lit cubes and rectangles brilliant in every skyscraper, that ridiculous Christmas angel and its candle was touching in a way that it could not have been in Europe; so our united mood of premeditated nostalgia flourished nicely, though I still think it might have flourished just as nicely at 2.20 P.M.

That special Christmas at Cap-Ferrat, the year before, was the occasion on which H. G. Wells gave me the leather writing-pad with a zip-fastener, on condition that I should never think of it as a Christmas *present*; so I must choose three others: an old-fashioned but valuable little étui in tortoiseshell and silver; a large raffia washing-bag, and a seal (non-performing). The seal, non-performing, was not given to me like the étui and the washing-bag at respectively one and three A.M. on Christmas morning; the seal had (not

literally) leapt upon me in the best way of all presents, when there was no special occasion, for it was from someone who had no special reason to give it except a spontaneous love of giving. He was, in fact, Moysheh Oyved whose antique jewel shop, Cameo Corner, is like an Aladdin's cave; visited punctually every year by Queen Mary. Moysheh Oyved's pride is in these visits, and the rest of his love and pride is given wholly to precious stones. I have never before met an Israelite who so isolated his passion for beauty, concentrating it all in one place; for music meant little to him, and pictures and poetry; but when he talked of the fantasy of jewels, of their colour and rarity, of jewels in the matrix and jewels cut to flash in facets, when he talked of the history of precious stones and how they felt to the wise caress of his finger-tips, then he became more than an enthusiast and an expert; for it was as though you could hear his blood singing as he spoke; he spoke not simply, but in speech encrusted and luminous; and as a climax he would pull a handful of flashing lumps from his pocket and fling them on the table, and begin telling you about them, crooning and adoring, a jewel-song more exciting than any sung by a prima donna with long flaxen plaits. Well, it is a good thing to trade in precious stones if that is how you feel about them, and Moysheh Oyved deserved this deep satisfaction. And, as I remarked before, he gave me a seal, a romantic little seal in worn gold, stamped with a device of two arrows piercing a heart. I employ the pretty thing only rarely; for self-consciousness crept in: if I was sealing an envelope that contained a cheque to pay a bill, or merely writing to a friend, to use it would be like sticking stamps at erratic angles to show I was sending kisses. And the niceties would not permit that, either.

Our house-party that Christmas numbered six counting

our host, and not one of us was related to any other one of us. This was accidental, but it worked out in sweet dulcet harmonies. Our surroundings were sybaritic and the weather glorious. I have already mentioned that there were golden oranges everywhere. ("Apple-blossom everywhere!" "Surely," said Saki's Lady Caroline, "surely only on the apple-trees?") On Christmas Eve we drove up to a party at Roquebrune; drove up in that state of protest which simply means that nothing outside could be an improvement on what we had already, so why move? However, manners prevailed, and as we alighted we were suddenly transfigured into separate little miracles of courteous geniality and "How kind of you to have asked us!" That Christmas party was a child's dream of superabundance in crackers and presents and what Main Street calls "the eats." We began with drinks and refreshments, and then had dinner, and then supper. Large ornamental crackers hung from the ceiling; crackers surged up in delirium from the ground; fresh loads were wheeled in by the servants; they were flung at us by our hostess; a repletion, a surfeit, a cataract of crackers; an orgy of blue and green and scarlet paper and gold lace; gorgeous crackers holding gorgeous presents; Christmas (one sort of Christmas) made concrete in crackers; crackers that multiplied as they were torn asunder, so that the guests round the table rose head and shoulders from a gleaming mass of blue and green and scarlet and gold, like mermaids from the foam, or like decorous Hollywood stars out of their bath. The crackers themselves held wonderful presents, and there were also presents on each plate and in each glass. In the struggle to give us presents somehow, to heap us with not one nor two but several dozens of presents, every desperate device was employed. Every game we played had prizes, and there were prizes afterwards for those who had not yet won any-

thing in the games. Then came a huge Christmas tree loaded with presents; and more presents on the supper-table, just for fun, in case we had not received any presents . . . So that I still cannot understand, after eager grateful farewells (and a sudden lapse, as we drove off, into being natural, united and surly), now on arrival at our own villa, our home villa, our villa where we still wanted to be and never to leave, we found, on exhibiting our presents, that we had only one each; just one. I suppose the others must have turned into dead leaves. And even these solitary presents, as exhibited shortly after three o'clock on Christmas morning, had a delicious unsuitability. My demure tortoiseshell étui, for instance, was complete in every bodkin; but I never sewed, I never bodkined. The man-of-the-world of our party produced, in rather a puzzled way, a huge raffia washing-bag; it can *not* have been the present intended for him; he was a connoisseur both in business and in his pleasures and collections; still, there he was, and there was the washing-bag decorated with raffia roses and lilies. All the other presents had reached equally unsuitable destinations, except for one of us who hugged a whisky decanter which would have been suitable for any of us. And H. G., who had been given most, mysteriously had none at all. A little subdued, we wished each other Merry Christmas, and retired. But presently I heard a knock at my door, and there stood the man-of-the-world, hesitant, with the raffia washing-bag; “I thought you might like this . . . You were saying downstairs you wished it had been you.” I was deeply moved by his sacrifice. Yes, I had said it, trying to cheer him up and make him more contented with his lot. We began to talk; we exchanged confidences; we talked for a long time; we exchanged addresses; why it had to be done then, at that curious hour, Heaven alone knows, for we were to be together for the

next week; and I still wonder why, before exchanging visiting-cards, we found it necessary to put them into envelopes and solemnly seal them down. I used the seal given to me by Moysheh Oyved; I forget what was the device on the seal ring used by the man of the world, but he remarked that it had been given him by an antique dealer who had a marvellous knowledge of precious stones. By the way, called Moysheh Oyved.

Yes, it was just that sort of Christmas.

And the next day, or rather the same day, as we lay happily idle on orange mattresses strewn on the terrace, wondering if we were too hot and if we ought to fetch our shady hats, music from the wireless flooded through the open french-windows of the sitting-room behind us. It was High Mass at St. Peter's. Here were we, and here was Rome; music and brilliant sunshine, and oranges on the trees, and a potential dinner of sucking-pig after a brisk walk down steep cobbled paths between gardens vivid with washing and more oranges—not our tame English washing, pale pinks and pale blues, but flares of crude colour; and then drinks at little tables on the terrace overhanging the harbour where dozens of brightly painted boats rocked and bumped merrily; and the car to take us home again because the road wound uphill all the way, yea to the very end, and it would be unpardonable if we kept the sucking-pig waiting.

Well, that was one Christmas, not our daily life. Yet perhaps we needed our present drastic chastening. It was H. G. Wells himself, in a speech at a huge party given in his honour on his seventieth birthday, who said that he felt at any moment Nurse might come in and say: "Now, Master Bertie, time to pack up your toys." We have all packed up our toys, now; that villa in the South of France is less than half an hour from the Italian border; nor do I think my étui

will be of much service in a world stripped as bare for reality as a rock is bare to the assaulting waves; even the washing-bag would be better without its raffia roses and lilies that catch in everything.

Oranges at Christmas reappeared in my life in 1939, though in a nice contrast of conditions, five days after I had had an operation and was lying in a nursing-home in Bedfordshire with hæmolytic streptococcal septicæmia for my inseparable companion. My doctor specialised in fasting certain of his patients on orange-juice. For nearly four months nothing eatable came near me except oranges, grapefruit and tangerines, with once a day a whisper of weak Marmite. It is lamentable, the difference between oranges growing on terraces in the sunshine, to be eaten as fancy pleases, with the prospect of sucking-pig among other items for one's Christmas dinner, and oranges joined to the word "fasting," brought to your bedside in Bedfordshire, with no pig in any succulent crackling form, and beyond the window the ice-grey Northern weather. "If it's oranges you want," smirked the small god Irony, knowing how I had lusted for another Christmas of exactly the same shape, size and contents as at that villa in the South of France, "if you're sure it's *oranges* you want—" I ought to have mentioned that I only wanted them with the leaf attached, and the bough behind the leaf, and the tree behind the bough, and the terrace supporting the tree, and my own two legs supporting myself. The small god of Irony (who, like pantomime managers of old, "surpasses himself" time after time) should have known without being told when oranges are symbolical, and when they are a diet.

While I lived in Italy for six years, we had several two-pence-coloured Christmases; and once were able to eat our Christmas dinner on the loggia, with green peas from the gar-

den and a Bradenham ham (from Fortnum's) to flank the orthodox turkey and plum-pudding. Only once was there snow at Christmas, as heavy as any in England except those startling arctic Decembers of 1938 and 1939; but these had not yet arrived, and usually Christmas in England was labelled with my least favourite adjective: mild. Mild leads to tepid, and tepid leads to soup or to baths which should not ever be tepid unless so desired; but the subject of baths is not for this book, rather for a little monograph in the style of Sherlock Holmes: "My dear Watson, have you not read my little monograph on the subject of baths in which I have dealt exhaustively with their four hundred and thirteen varieties?"

The only dog whom we took with us from England to Italy was a brown spaniel of a not very witty disposition, named Dr. Watson. He was naturally less astonished than the other dogs at the sight of snow deep on the ground, not only on the hills above us, but all the way down the olive terraces to the loggia where, for once contemplative, they were huddled into a group, wolfhound and spaniel and terrier. Dr. Watson was telling them about a Typical English Yule, introducing free quotations from Dickens. But for the others, his spaniel wife and sons, and for the Sicilian wolf Boris, and the Alsatian Tessa, and for the mongrel terrier Kim who had been brought out to Italy as a troublesome puppy with no memories but only bad habits, the snow itself was enough; and Scrooge and Bob Cratchit and Tim Linkinwater and Trotty Veck and Tom Pinch and the Cheeryble brothers were no more than a collection of boring additions to Watson's boring characters that always figure in his boring English anecdotage. This snow, its pure sharp breath, its whiteness undefiled, and every now and then that strange tumble of more whiteness and purity from the sky, this snow filled them

with awe; they could shake it from their backs, but not from their souls. Presently Boris in a dreamy sort of way, his brow furrowed with the unaccustomed effort going on behind it, began talking about sheep. He had an affectionate gentle nature, and chasing sheep (as he had tried to explain over and over again) was an atavistic instinct and meant no harm; in fact, he thought them charming, quite charming. Yet whenever he saw them, a shuffling agitated crowd of blurred white among the dark silver-green of the olive trees, he simply *had* to chase them, however much his higher nature disapproved. Since snow had fallen, and his bright blue Mediterranean world had changed, a different impulse had touched him: he badly wanted to make friends with the sheep, and lie down with them. “But sheep are so suspicious, they won’t *let* me lie down with them. I had prepared several things to say, to correct any little misunderstandings that might have occurred in the past. I was going to begin, ‘Seasonable weather we’re having—’”

Here Tessa contradicted him; she always contradicted her large, splendid and not particularly intelligent husband: “You mean *unseasonable*.” “No, I don’t,” said Boris. “Or do I?” He mused for a while with alternative growls: “Most seasonable,” “Most unseasonable,” “*Most* seasonable,” “*Most* unseasonable,” trying the effect either might have on a flock of silly suspicious sheep with whom nevertheless he must make friends because of the snow and Christmas and the sun and the solemn command that he dimly felt had once been laid upon him or his ancestors: “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb—” Dr. Watson, not a success with his Dickens, reverted to grumbling as usual about the nest-egg of biscuits which he had left behind in England. None of the others believed these biscuits exsited, though he said they amounted to at least a hundred and twenty. Actually I could

have corroborated the fable: Dr. Watson had always had a careful disposition, and when we lived in a cottage near Chalfont St. Giles he used to trot forth every morning to bury his biscuit, every line of his spaniel body testifying that he was thinking of a rainy day. We were four months in that cottage, so he was right about the hundred and twenty biscuits; but then heartlessly we gave him no warning when we transplanted him to Italy, so his nest-egg was no use to him (a human moral in this, perhaps). Now the snowy day reminded him of biscuits galore: "We might have taken them in and shared them by the fire, if the Legs would let us. I like eating indoors, don't you, Boris?" "Yes," replied Boris, "*and* out-of-doors." Golden Toes, eldest son of Watson and Renny who was a born fusspot, broke irrepressibly into laughter, rolling over and over on his back. Toes was the colour of ribbed wet sand flooded with the glow of a rich amber sunset; he had large kind paws, and I loved him best of all the spaniels. Kim, the cleverest of the group, with enough character to supply at least twenty other dogs and still have some left over for himself, was my most beloved: a smooth-haired Irish terrier with a touch of greyhound to keep him live and quick. My husband had brought him out as a present for the English girl who lived at the foot of the hill, but the English girl's mother at the foot of the hill said Kim was a mongrel and would not keep him; she did not realise that, while he might not have come out of the Cruft drawer, he had the soul of a cynic, the mind of a genius, and the manners of an aristocrat. In addition to all that, he led the life of a rake, and died rather after the fashion of Sydney Carton.

Boris had been brought to us as a small wolf-puppy, solemn and grizzled, with a soft fussy body and enormous horn-rimmed spectacles marking his eyes. My husband, with

an engaging smile not free from the deepest guilt, said that Boris was to be his Christmas present to me. This was May, but I could only put up a very feeble argument against keeping him; ‘‘Darling, you know we *said* that five dogs would be enough.’’ And indeed, we had most definitely and most severely decided against any increase in the kennels. My husband instantly switched off the Christmas present line, which sounded a bit too permanent, and shamelessly declared that the puppy had only been given to him to hold for a day or two (like the Great Seal) and would be fetched before Saturday. ‘‘By whom?’’ I asked. And after that, the dialogue came to pieces in his hands. Of course we kept Boris; nobody can not keep a puppy. He developed into a splendid wolfhound of the Sicilian breed, which meant that his forehead was broader than an Alsatian’s, his eyes wider apart, and his ears flopped instead of pricking upright. He had a white chest, and a deep musical exciting howl. Once, lying in the upper bunk of my bedroom, I was able to watch Boris practising his howl in front of the long mirror, when he imagined he was alone. He trotted straight across the room to the looking-glass, and planting himself firmly in front of it, he threw back his head and howled again and again, very softly and beautifully; then, satisfied, he trotted away. I was profoundly interested in the performance, for, on my honour, this is no legend or delusion but the truth. I suppose he wanted to be howl-perfect for Tessa’s sake.

Tessa was a highly bred Alsatian with the very hell of a temper. The friend who travelled out with her to Italy demanded several thousands of pounds compensation for twenty-four hours of misery. Tessa in puppyhood was terribly thin and horribly unamiable, and we never thought we should succeed in rearing her. However, she grew up to be the most beautiful of them all, disdainful of our caresses and as conceited

as Narcissus. Whenever Boris, who was easily shocked, reproved her, she laughed and tossed her exquisite little head and said that she was going into films, and how would he like that? Tessa's first family was magnificent: there were nine of them, three girls and six boys, and seven survived. We named them Lobo, Rollo, Jeremy, Nona—I can't remember the other three, but I can remember what a lovely sight it was when the puppies were half grown and the Legs-in-Authority used to run along the terraces with six wolves tearing along ahead of him like flying dogs in a frieze between the grass and the sky and the olive trunks. Very reluctantly we gave them all away to good homes, and were left with Boris and Tessa, Renny, Kim, and Toes. Watson had died on foreign soil, and Boris was the only one whom we took back to England with us after we had lived for six years at La Carruba.

The arctic English Christmas of 1938 I spent (paradoxically) in Scotland, in a little hotel at the Kyle of Loch Alsh where you cross by ferry to Skye. A powerful conspiracy of well-wishers did all they could to prevent us from going, and the weather continued to play up like mad to every idea of expresses derailed, and being snowed up for days with no food and no heating and blinding blizzards: "There's ice on all the sleepers," they said. "You'll never get there," they said. An alternative idea was that we should get there and never get back again; weeks later, a search party, picking their way with lanterns, would find us in the hotel lounge, stiff and frozen and starved to death. This Lucy Gray business had a great deal of sense behind it, as the blizzards continued to rage, and the papers and the wireless spread reports of bursting pipes, floods, and disaster; moreover, I had scarcely recovered from five weeks' illness, predecessor of an

illness which on the following Christmas was to bring me to the melancholy diet of oranges in a nursing-home in Bedfordshire; *most* unseasonable, as Boris might have said to the Italian sheep. However, infatuated with Skye and the notion of an untraditional Christmas, we decided we would risk it. Euston, when we pulled out of it not too unpunctually, looked and felt as though it had been built out of black icicles. Our dinner was excellent and our wagon-lits warm and cosy, with the ventilation adjusted fastidiously according to taste. I slept well and awoke in Scotland. When I slid aside the shutters of my wagon-lit I had no idea I should see that amazement of dark blue Italian skies and sea, that sparkle of frost in the sunshine, a sight so exhilarating that the memory of England groaning under its heavy burden of iron-grey weather slipped off my mind, not to return until a week later when we had to think of the icy peril of once more plunging south.

Nearly every Jew I have met, including myself whom I suppose I have met (though never quite to my satisfaction), carries in his heart this special love for Scotland. The joke must be almost worn out, now, of “Scotch” money-lenders called Grahame or McDougall. It may be the austerity about the true Scot which contrasts with the flamboyancy of his own race, that fascinates the Israelite; but then the best Israelites are not flamboyant; are, in fact, themselves not unlike the Scots in their characteristic quality of mournful irony, a form of outward acceptance (“for the sake of a quiet life”) and inward repudiation. I once planned a short story, one of those which literally never get themselves written; every right-minded story ought to get itself written after a laborious two or three pages at the beginning, and so there must have been some mental reluctance over “Holy Land”—for that was to have been the title. Perhaps I felt

that the whole joy lay in the point of it, and not in the work which would have to be gone through before I reached the point. So that here and now is the obvious way for me to get rid of "Holy Land" for ever, simply and lazily telling my readers the point and leaving out all the rest.

The hero was to be a nice little, rich little Jew, whom his friends and his wife called Tubby. His wife, not so nice, sent for her special corsetière, and was told that Madame So-and-so had gone to the Holy Land. Having a slavish admiration for Madame So-and-so, whose clientèle was so well-bred that like the best port it could stand upright sustained in its own crust without any surrounding bottle, Tubby's wife thereupon began to reproach her husband for his lack of true racial spirit. Tubby returned an evasive answer, but she never ceased working on him till she persuaded him to do the chic thing and pay a visit to the country of the Patriarchs and the Old Testament. I see at this point of the story I have a note in brackets saying, "Goyisher wife? or not?" As I am not writing the story, it need luckily never be thrashed out. (Oh, the cool indolent loveliness of *not* writing a story!) Anyhow, Tubby obeys her at last, departs on his pilgrimage, and returns "changed in some indefinable manner"—as we are allowed to say, loosely, before we begin to revise; if I were revising, I should have to do something about that indefinable manner; define it, perhaps. I think Tubby was more reserved, more self-reliant; his brown spaniel eyes dwelt less upon his pretty red-haired wife (red-haired whether Goyisher or not) and more as though he were contemplating some distant shore. Puzzled and undoubtedly a little cross, she talked to her friends about this change in Tubby, and they all said: "It's your own fault. You *would* send him to Palestine, and he'll have met a girl of his own people out there—maidens, they call them—big dark eyes,

soft curves, meek tender Ruth-and-Naomi type, in her own surroundings, too, fetching water from the well all the time, pitcher on her shoulder. No, it's no good you trying to do that here in London: what would everyone *think*? No, you've been and gone and done it, shooing Tubby off on that rather ridiculous quest. Disappeared again, did you say? Oh, my dear, how tiresome of him! But what can you expect? No, I shouldn't put the wireless or the police on it. Simply a reversion to type: he's gone on all these years with the thing simmering and stewing in his blood and not even knowing it; but directly he got to the Holy Land, of course he found out."

Here I decided that the story must be in the first person: one of these onlooker first persons, intelligent and detached, knowing everybody in the story and admitted to confidences directly it suited the author; one of these unobtrusive-in-last-year's-lounge-suit sort of men. Now either he is curious in his unobtrusive-lounge-suit sort of way about Tubby, and gets a clue to his whereabouts and follows him up; or he stumbles across him accidentally. I think probably the former; this type of first person in a story, unobtrusive, pleasant, liking everybody, I-mind-my-own-business type of man, is always extraordinarily curious. Anyhow, as you will have guessed, he finds Tubby not in Palestine, but happily fishing in Scotland; no tourist guidebook romantic-picturesque pseudo-Scotland either, but the real thing. The Hebrides, for instance.

I believe I mentioned before that the story was to be called "Holy Land."

By now it will have been understood that Tubby and I feel the same about these matters.

I had gone to Skye twice before this escape Christmas of 1938: once at Easter, when Prunella and myself were given

our first hazardous introduction to Scotland by our two friends, Paul and Drew. They both knew Skye well, and loved it with an aching nostalgic love; like true lovers they were sensitive of criticism and deadly afraid that the Hebrides might lie under a soft drizzling sponge during the whole of our ten-day holiday, and that Prunella and I would return to England saying: "Well, for the life of me I can't see what they *see* in it." However, the weather was glorious and we had no difficulty in seeing what they saw in it. I scribbled several pages of rough notes about Skye and our journey up by express as far as Fort William, and then on by car. But they seem to be inseparably entangled with other notes of the time when Paul drove me up that road with the invigorating signpost "To the North," and to Catterick Bridge and across the moors and into Scotland by Dere Street and Watling Street, straight over the border at Carter Bar. That time, the journey was everything, and we only got as far as Edinburgh for a couple of nights. We went to Skye for the second time the Christmas before that Christmas of sensational weather, only I remember less about it. Both Christmases we stayed in the little hotel at the Kyle of Loch Alsh instead of on Skye itself, because our usual hotel at Sligachan where the quartette had stayed during our first visit, was closed. The Kyle of Loch Alsh is where the ferryboats cross to Skye, so the separation is not unendurable, and even at night you can lie in bed and see the dark shape of the island opposite, across a brief space of shining black water, and see the red and green lights of the steamers slowly passing to and fro a few yards away.

Here are my notes just as I found them, thrown down at random from those three visits. I should not dare to publish them in this nonchalant take-it-or-leave-it fashion if it were not that my motives are pure as those of the Happy Warrior,

and nonchalance and indolence have nothing to do with them. Hand across your throat? No, not hand across my throat because there *may* be just the merest spot of idleness somewhere, and throats cannot be risked in this fashion. But my chief motive is that either rough notes should be left rough, or nobody must know they have ever been notes at all. A rough note has a certain vitality; a note expanded and polished is just a bore. We have all sat next to expanded-and-polished notes at dinner-parties, and constantly we have tried to break away and talk to the person on the other side. But please do not take this too literally. Only yesterday someone asked me if I liked cauliflower, and I answered: “Not much. Cauliflowers are so worthy; I’ve sat next to them at dinner-parties when I couldn’t help myself.” A little later an agitated voice was heard asking a mutual friend whether I was *quite* all there, because I had been saying I sat next to cauliflowers at dinner-parties.

Skye. Easter, 1935, with Prunella and Drew and Paul.

The beige and tawny Highland cattle, shaggy hair in a fringe (rather like mine) and short and stocky.

The lovely plain grey arches of each bridge. And the sound of the brown burn. And the smoke rising from lonely places where they burn the earth for peat. And the Cairn puppy (Wazzums). And the colours in the landscape, luminous pink and dark luminous gold and indigo and pale crocus mauve, and deep thick purple, and then soft velvety grey, and Mediterranean blue, and sudden silver on the water like an apparition of God, with steely shadows across. And red-brown bracken patches all over the hills. And black, and white edges of snow.

The pale arctic glamour of the far-away ranges, faint blue and silver and shadow-grey and lucent white, seen in sudden

strangeness on the coast road on the way north to Ston. A sort of pouring of light into it, fitfully, in streaks, from a sky of tumbled whorls of white cloud and silver sun.

Lying in the bracken and looking across a strip of Atlantic to the Outer Isles. Rhum, just a strange far-away shadow of an island, pearly on a blue sky, and a sheet of silver sunshine between. Then, as the sky clouded over and the mountains huddled nearer and darker, the Isle of Rhum approached, long symmetrical waves of dark indigo on either side, and a purple slope, up and down, lower than the slopes behind. And the unbroken sheet of dazzling silver, broken into sharper glitters of silver and steel.

Birds: herons (one in flight), gulls, curlews. A nice common little English robin. Two ducks flying in formation across the Loch at Dungavey so low that they only just skimmed over their own racing shadows.

Skye and Loch Alsh, Christmas, 1938.

The sea and open lochs in shining stripes of blue and deeper blue and quivering silver; definite at three points of the compass, but where it opens towards the north, that look of lit strangeness and far-away ice lies across it, and you think you can see even farther than it would be possible to see. At sunset (from the train) the mountains were luminous plum-colour—the pinky sort of plum—laid over darkness. The bracken a bright tan which looked red from the distance. Stalactites and daggers of gleaming ice stabbed from the banks in clusters. A powder of frost flashed in tiny diamonds from the coarse ginger-bright grass and vivid green moss. Bare twigs of the bushes with crystal drops. On the first day, the mountains were unshadowed; the second day they had a few swathes of cloud to soften and alter them in the sunlight. The ferry and the steamer with one red funnel. The parliament of Scottish gulls outside our windows, on the

patch of grass with white rail and flagstaff like a ship, made me remember the Danish sparrows at Klampenborg and their rumpled backs, and the way they snatched my breakfast on the balcony looking over the sea towards Sweden.

At Sligachan, C. and his dog (West Highland), and the wonderful mellow Talisker whisky thirty-five years old.

Down by the shore, just above the Bay of Ord, we suddenly had an impulse to forsake the car, walk a little way off and lean over the gate. And for a moment I had a passionate hatred for motor-cars that could let me neither hear nor smell, but only see. The air and the turf and the seaweed smelt sweet and aromatic, and we heard the waves break in a long thin sound as though a line of glass were being very gently, very regularly shattered a quarter of a mile away. And curlews were twittering and curving near by, or perhaps they were smaller, friendlier birds; and a few sheep with black faces grazed near the quiet grey stone sheds and barns. And the wind fluttered and sighed in the sun.

“Is that Rhum?” I asked Paul. “That’s Rhum,” he replied. Of course we should have phrased it: “Is that the Isle of Rhum?” “Yes, that’s the Isle of Rhum.” Different atlases spell it with or without the mellowing h and certainly Rhum, from wherever you view it, looks improbably romantic; but Rhum remains Rum, whichever way you pronounce it: however deep and tender the timbre of your voice, you can do little or nothing with a name like that, nor indeed with Harris. The associations are unkind in both cases. “Rum alone’s the tippie to die the copper nose of the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.” And Mrs. Harris . . . “There ain’t no sich person.” Now if Rhum had been called Stornoway, which on the contrary is a little town on Lewis, I should not have been forced to call it the Isle of Rhum every time I allude to it;

which in any case I refuse to do, because plain ugliness is to be preferred to sheer affectation.

But in whatever light you chance to see that shape of purple or grey or damson-blue, it picks up beauty and holds it as only an island can do; and then it has to be far enough from land for you to see nothing but its outline filled in with colour. Directly you could say, "Look, there's a postman," or "Look, there's a sheep," it would spoil it; your companion would ask, "Where?" and you would reply, "Over there in Rhum, just passing that bit of bog-oak," or "Standing under that mountain ash"; and he, being the more Scottish of the two, might coldly inform you, "We call yon mountain ash 'rowan' here in the North, and that isn't bog-oak at all." And while you sank deeper and deeper into bog-argument, the sun would be slanting lower, setting the island on fire; and then lower still, so that presently Rhum would fade and fade even while you were arguing. So I was glad it was so far away across the Bay of Ord that no postman and no rowan could be distinguished, and there was nothing further to do except lean over the gate and look at Rhum and smell the grassy air roughened with salt, and go on looking at it, and wonder when we should see it again. "Next Christmas," I said to Paul, when I had had rather more than I could bear of imagining myself, next Christmas, somewhere quite different perhaps, longing to be back on Skye and leaning over the gate just above Ord Bay looking across in solitude towards Rhum, looking my first, looking my last on all things lovely. "Next Christmas," I repeated, bluff and hearty, and leaving out "perhaps" because I feared Paul was going to throw an attack of scepticism. But he said to my amazement, "Yes, we'll come here next Christmas," so that for the sake of D.V. and touch wood and all the rest of supersti-

tion, I had to add quickly: “We may not be able to, of course. It would be safer to stop here *till* next Christmas.”

And then slowly and reluctantly we climbed into the car, and backed, and made motoring noises which startled the whaups, and drove away. Slowly and reluctantly.

PART TWO

Bridlepath to Pleshey

Part Two

BRIDLEPATH TO PLESHEY

A FRIEND ONCE WROTE to me about a book of mine, saying, "I congratulate you on having had the luck to stumble on such a wonderful subject," or words to that effect. I wired back, "Not luck stop genius." I felt it my duty to fly into an extravagant passion over this, for a choice of subject is not, as he declared, a matter of luck. We are lucky only in that each of us carries a sort of water-diviner's twig; this invisible twig we move slowly over the whole available mass of buried material until suddenly it quivers and leaps and almost twitches itself from our hands. But for this twig's talent for selection and rejection, the author, far from having to create bricks without straw, might well die from straw-suffocation. This was once nearly my own fate when a firm of publishers offered me a generous sum to write them a biography and in my blunt, bluff, manly fashion I asked: "Whose?" They replied: "Anyone you like." I reeled madly for a little while between history, literature and the Bible; but of the million subjects for biography thus offered me, my private and personal hazel twig responded enthusiastically to none until I came to Ouida. Here it paused, quivered, leapt, and I knew immediately that she was my man. Indeed, with such mysterious certainty had she been chosen for me, that I set about collecting material before the publisher had even time to sanction my choice. I

went to see the plain little brick house where she was born, on the outskirts of Bury St. Edmunds, and the drinking-fountain for horses and dogs which they had set up as a memorial to the author who had loved horses and dogs; it was a hot day and small boys were splashing and paddling in it, but perhaps she would not have minded this, for they might grow up into guardsmen. Had they been girls, she might have broken out in a typical Ouidaesque rage; for, excepting her mother to whom she was devoted all her life, she had not cared for her own sex. During her first years of fame she used to give large dinner-parties at the Langham Hotel, but no women were present except herself and her mother. They stayed at table until the last glass of port was drunk, because Ouida believed that you could learn life and facts and wisdom by listening to gentlemen, but never by listening to ladies. By way of ironical comment the publishers then sent me word that a biography of Ouida did not appeal to them, and would I do Lorenzo the Magnificent instead?

I did not do Lorenzo the Magnificent, because, as far as his biography was concerned, I was not tickled to death; and you ought always to be tickled to death before you approach your subject, whether you are writing fiction, plays, biography or essays. The most shocking disasters happen if you force a selection onto your rejection nerve; they happen also if you betray that queer thing in you which knows without any question when you have wholly finished with a certain character or group or theme of which our selective antennæ originally approved. This is where our readers perplex us by their steady refusal to accept the chucker-out; their loyal demand that we should return again and again to our original selection: Why doesn't he give us another Forsyte book, they say; another volume of Sherlock Holmes, another book

about the Provincial Lady, another Jalna book, another Lucia book. I am guilty myself in this respect: *why* doesn't he give us another Lucia book? (He died a few months ago, otherwise perhaps I should not be wailing in vain on the now empty air of Riceholme and Tilling.) And: Why does she not give us another Matriarch book? Because at present, anyhow, there are no more. I do not mean there is no more material, or no more Matriarch. Though she died in her ninetieth year, there is as much of her, I suppose, as ever there was; but for the time she is couchant, not rampant. If ever she becomes rampant again, she or her descendants, my twig will know immediately. Indeed, I have felt some far-away tremors and quiverings, but not enough yet.* Believe me, we do not always know when we are writing a bad book or a dull book, or when our grammar goes to bits, or when the chief character decides to remain a block of wood; but we do know almost at once when we are selecting a subject against the grain of the wood, against the movement of the twig. We do know when our antennæ begin slowly waving. We do know what is our own cup of tea.

Still in a rage, I scrawled all this wisdom to the friend who had congratulated me on my luck in having stumbled across the peculiar character who was the heroine of my latest novel; barked my shins against her, as Touchstone barked his shins against his own wit and so became aware of it. I informed him that I had scribbled her down as a mere three lines in a rough note about ten years ago, and that virtue (not luck) lay in my deep conviction that, looking no more potential than a hundred other rough notes, yet in my hands she alone of all of them, would expand and blossom like Japanese flowers in water. I reminded him scathingly of a

* This was written about six months ago. A new Matriarch book has just been begun.

passage in Somerset Maugham's preface to his collected short stories. I reminded him of this all the more scathingly because (as it happens) he *was* Somerset Maugham.

A whole pageant is perpetually passing and repassing under the author's nose, in endless bounty. One's rough notebook is the best indication of this procession going on; it is not simply a question of choosing your subject from early environment, or from the sort of life you know best, though these come into it, too, but by a more secret process. In H. G. Wells' preface, also, to his collection of short stories, we can find his version of the matter; apparently at one period of his life he had only to see a garden door set in a wall, its green paint peeling in the pale sun, or a small dim shop in an arcade, or a mushroom on a suburban plate, and off he went, with his "It isn't you, it isn't you, it isn't you, it's *you*."

Half your acquaintances are eager to help the poor author by abundant supplies of raw material: "I'll tell you an extraordinary thing that happened to me once," they'll say, "and you can have it and make it into a book. I can't write, or I'd do it myself." It need not always be what has happened to them; it may have happened to their mother in infancy or to their uncle in Venezuela; but at all events they hand it to you as a free gift. Or again: "You must make friends with my cook before you go; she'll talk to you for hours; she's a real character—do for one of your books." For these innocently helpful laymen invariably mistake volubility for a professional's paradise. They never realise that authors are not prowling around, perpetually hungry for sausages. Hungry we are, but we have to select our own sausages.

A book of rough notes is the author's "cupboard of food and cabinet of pleasure," but a dangerous cupboard and

cabinet to keep on the premises. If a man lives and travels and mixes, he can bring us home a bright packet of wisdom and news. Recognition, however, goes deeper than enlightenment. Enlightenment is only the top stuff. Recognition is no mere matter of spotting something which we feel would be interesting, but a delighted reunion between what is interesting and what we know we can establish for the interest of those who read us; so that they are impelled to scribble, "How true!" over and over again in the margin. "How true!" does not indicate, "Here is a platitude"; it indicates, "Here is truth"; and truth is good news wherever it is written. No, this is manifestly absurd; nobody could call "Paroled Convict Slays Entire Family" good news, however readable. But in literature and all forms of creative art the truth is good news enough, however tragic, however unpalatable, because one man has, so to speak, got down to it. Hearing the Ninth Symphony for the first time, a travelling aeroplane might well have scribbled in some imperishable smoke from end to end of the sky: "How true!"

When I spent a day in the Assizes Hall in a West Country town, every case that came up was a story, yet not one of them was mine. But a certain brief paragraph in the newspaper quoting a case at the Midland Assizes sent me right off into an ecstasy of satisfaction, for here was what I needed and the answer to my search for the second half of the very book which started this discussion, the one that owed nothing to luck.

Of course, these rough notes that we jot down year after year, often lose significance and fade away, richly spicing the air, and not always that; especially if we do not fill them out properly but rely on memory and intelligence in years to come. Only recently I found this attack of nonsense:

Baby seals. March 1st.

On Men. Look up St. F. and St. E., but on the contrary Mr. T. Gows?

Ask Paul about his mysterious wallflowers. Why link with bath-room?

Rip Van Winkle as title possibility. How much or how little war ought one to put in? Link with the smell of may.

Always desired for instance a nest of tables.

The last item I have elucidated; but meanwhile I am remembering with a certain embarrassment a Girls' Annual to which I had contributed a story—I think when I was about nineteen; anyhow, it was before I had written my first novel. Another contributor had written a playlet called "The Princess Will Not Dance," which I had read with interest, for it was about the little sister of my favourite king, Charles II, and Louis XIV, the boy king of France. I thought it quite good and I thought so (though in less patronising terms) when, more than twenty years later, the same Margaret Irwin wrote "Royal Flush" about the little sister of Charles II, and Louis XIV of France; the first of her famous series of historical novels of that period. Already then she *knew*, and did not fritter away her energy on a story about the New Girl in the Fourth Form at St. Ursula's.

I believed (then) that her contribution was not quite as good as my own. My own was a stirring tale of Elizabethan adventure on the Spanish Main; my heroine, a Cornish maiden called Jennifer, had a twin brother, and they dreamt the same dream about buried treasure, and when the brother was killed looking for it, she dressed up as a boy and went to avenge him and was shown the treasure by a Spanish girl (called Dolores, I expect) who, thinking she was a boy, fell wistfully in love with her. You will guess that I had been reading the Sweet-Maiden-I-prithee-Nay-good-Sir type of

juvenile fiction, besides "As You Like It" and "The Brushwood Boy," but what you may not guess was the incredible badness of the whole thing, especially a ripple of pseudo-Elizabethan dialogue. No other word will describe it except Evelyn Waugh's "hot-making" (for unfortunately I kept that Annual, or we might never have blushed so hotly). And the moral of all this? That I was not from the hour of birth destined to be a historical novelist. Margaret Irwin was. Her instinct fell true, even then. You may argue that in that case, why, young as you were, did the hazel twig not warn you by remaining numb and impassive to any suggestion of the Spanish Main? Five minutes ago I had no answer ready, but suddenly (and only just in time) it came to me: I must have been imitating—I forget whom, but some favourite historical writer for girls. And directly you yield to imitation, your twig will become limp and useless, and you are a water-diviner no more.

Ask Paul about his mysterious wallflowers. Why link with bathroom?

This particular note must have referred to some forgotten moment during a week-end in Paul's house.

When I awoke that Sunday morning, it was raining with such purpose and determination that one could be sure, contentedly, that not even a king-optimist would come along under the windows and shout: "It's a glorious morning. Are you going to waste all of it in bed?" and various other insulting clichés reserved for the sluggard. Not that I was ever a sluggard over early rising; and it has become sadly easier and earlier as my puppy years receded. My contentment arose more from the fact that I cannot bear indeterminate weather, the what-am-I-going-to-wear, what-are-we-going-to-do, do-we-want-a-fire weather in which England

excels. The rains swishing the trees and the duckpond and the garden outside my windows sounded so tropical that I cannot remember, now, what time of year we were at; only that it lay somewhere between the lovely Christmas at Skye in 1938 and my macabre Christmas of war and illness and fasting in 1939. So we will call it "the rainy season," which offers large room to swing a cat in.

The night before, I had gone rambling and browsing among Paul's bookshelves, to carry up a selection. (They were mostly Drew's books, given shelter, during his homeless period, in this pleasant old house in an Essex village.) Already I had that curious feeling that a "coincidence time" had begun which might last for several days or several weeks, not necessarily sensational coincidences—such as discovering that the schoolmaster of the village was the only man now alive who could possibly know where my great-aunt had hidden the missing will in Constantinople—but that succession of tiny startling moments, each no bigger than the prick of a pin in a sheet of paper and each letting through just that allowance of light and pattern from beyond: a name spoken haphazard linking presently with a poem picked up haphazard from an open page; an incident which you had forgotten for years, but something reminds you to tell it now, and half an hour later someone brings in just the same sort of apples which grew on the tree which shaded that September story, although while you were recalling it aloud a little while ago you had left out the apple-tree altogether. Just that sort of thing, beginning nowhere and ending nowhere, and mattering nothing except to you; but while it goes on, you are queerly excited, saying to yourself, "Here it is," and "Here it is again," weaving and patterning and linking up until once more it stops and daily life becomes accidental. Rebecca West always maintains that, while this "coincidence

time" is happening to her, she is uneasy, feeling it at least an announcement by the pre-Last Trump that the world is coming to an end, if not worse. It affects me, on the contrary, with an opposite wind; as though coherence were on its way to the world at last, and I had only to wait, breathlessly, till it came.

I may mention that whoever has charge of this department, whether Clotho or Lachesis or merely a quick little Poltergeist, only consents to do it in my case on a small domestic scale; nothing immense nor psychic nor awe-inspiring to the beholder; in fact, there is no beholder except myself, and probably I imagine it all, though I am perfectly sure I do not. It would be hard to persuade me that the Poltergeist who followed me round America while I was doing a lecture tour, had no existence except in my own mind; on the contrary, I can even tell you how he was dressed last time I saw him, in the uniform of a ship's purser, white and gold, with a peaked cap, and beneath it a broad red good-humoured face. I suppose he had other costumes for other occasions. He concentrated entirely for several months on having a merry time with my engagements, messages, telephone-calls, letters and appointments. Other matters he left alone. Let it be understood that I am not complaining; I had a very good time in America, on both the human and the business side, so that I was able to remain reasonably good-tempered while my Poltergeist sent letters astray, caused my friends to misunderstand what train I had meant, muddled restaurants, shuffled correspondence . . . An author friend from England whom I had not seen for several years, was actually lecturing in a twin town on the next-night-but-one following my own lecture; the evening in between was free for both of us, and there we both were; only Poltergeist saw to it well and truly that neither his letter to me, nor my letter to him announcing this

happy chance should be delivered to either of us until not more than seven minutes too late to do anything about it (Poltergeist liked delicate shades of time and place). That Poltergeist—I am using the language of the country in which he was operating—positively hated to have me go. I did not realise his deep attachment until I was on board the *Aquitania* and opening boxes of flowers in my cabin. About half an hour before we sailed, the purser came in, and scrutinised and took away the stateroom tickets belonging to my secretary and myself, in a perfectly orthodox way. The next morning, when we were bounding on the ocean, another purser, dressed in blue and gold instead of white and gold, knocked and asked politely for our stateroom tickets. When I said that our tickets had already been collected, he explained that no one had any authority to collect them until this moment, and that he was himself, so to speak, the one-and-only among pursers. Exhaustive inquiries were made, but among all the stateroom tickets collected, ours alone failed to turn up.* Nobody had seen him, nor had he called at any other cabin, this official whom I now knew (in fury and admiration) to have been my wee friend the Poltergeist. I could be sure of it, for, had the trick been played on me by common flesh and blood, undoubtedly someone would have stood to gain. And nobody gained. Simply, the Poltergeist came to see me off, and this was his characteristic idea of a bit of fun and bother before he finally had to say a regretful attagirl and farewell.

The pile of bedside books which I had collected from the sitting-room at High Easter, on the eve of that rainy Sunday morning, showed my brain was in a lazy state, for in this mood I was certainly more of a re-reader than a reader: Poems by Harold Monro, a volume of Neil Lyons, E. M. Forster's

* They had to wireless New York to confirm my identity and cabin bookings.

"Howards End," Sarah Orne Jewett—all these were old, not new favourites. And already I am feeling ungente towards you, gentle reader, for saying you have never heard of Neil Lyons. If I remind you of "Arthur's," "Clara," "Moby Lane," "Sixpenny Pieces," you will still say you have never heard of him. I might divulge, then, that he wrote a play called "London Pride" in which Gerald du Maurier acted during the last war. If you are old enough, that will ring the bell. It was, however, the least of his achievement. Seriously, though my indignation is not mock turtle, I do realise that I have no right to be indignant at all: these things just happen. And Neil Lyons gave up writing about fifteen years ago, and only started again a couple of years before his recent death. He specialised in short stories and sketches of London cockney life. Arthur was the owner of a London coffee-stall; Clara, a midwife. All the good-humour of the race of Cockaigne, their pungent slang, their absurd generous kindness, their devastating repartee, their shrewd philosophy of acceptance, their thousand comedies, pour through Neil Lyons and out again onto the page as though nothing were between the reader and this crowd of characters except such perfect mastery in presenting them that you are not even aware that such mastery exists. Neil Lyons' idiom, gathered from the streets and slums and markets, barrows and public-houses, can be compared with Dickens' cockney idiom, original and not in any way standardised, of Sam Weller's werry different, werry much earlier period. W. W. Jacobs was able to do this same magical trick with his language of the wharfs. It is a peculiar gift, given only to a very few writers, to be able to invent a language which strikes the reader as absolutely right, and which yet has never been used by any other writer to cover the same set of characters. Several American authors have this gift. Neil Lyons could feel the cockney in his bones, therefore

he wrote little masterpieces and miracles. Besides, Arthur and Clara and their like were his personal friends; he could sit with them happily for hours, listening or joining in, and later giving us a modest impression that they just tolerated him, hardly noticed his presence. Actually I should think they were sincerely fond of him, mourned him perhaps when he disappeared ("What's become of Waring, since he gave us all the slip?"). He had had a couple of cruel blows in his personal life, and had "gone Waring" to get over it; gone Waring into Sussex, where he lived alone with his dog in what is usually described as a rude cottage. His volume of stories and sketches called "Cottage Pie" had been published before all this happened, so that intimacy must already have taken place between him and the country—though I doubt if nature without people held any solace for him. He was an out-size in Abou Ben Adhem for loving his fellow-men.

"Run to seed" nearly always means, oddly enough, run to fat. It is extraordinary how people grow fat and not gaunt on sorrow and loneliness. When Neil Lyons returned to life and London, so many years later that we had already begun to forget that the cheery companionable little fellow whom we had liked so much could still have been found in England by a little hunting round and bother, he shocked me by his appearance as he opened the front door of a Dickens house in a Dickens street in a Dickens neighbourhood; shocked me because, knowing he had been poor and desperately unhappy, I had expected to find an orthodox appearance to tally with these conditions. He had been dark and rosy-cheeked and dapper. Now he was round and almost bald, with a round comical face, and a merry grin of welcome; an odd motley of clothes, too, tied round to keep him warm regardless of shape and colour, a motley of scarves and sweaters not worn at separate times but all together. He took me to lunch at one of those

jolly Dickens-flavoured pubs reeking with atmosphere where there was beer and bread and cheese and a cut off the joint, and every man present knew the griefs and disappointments of every other man present, and we all were terribly hail-fellow-well-met. Please believe, when I say that I was shocked and deadly uncomfortable, that I was not shocked because of my friend's lack of elegance, nor uncomfortable because the benches were hard and the air thick and smoky; I was shocked because of the things that treachery and loneliness and loss of love and the lack of recognition can do to a man like Neil Lyons; shocked by the physical as well as the mental transformations, for undoubtedly he felt himself compelled to put on a sort of Pagliacci act, deliberately being funnier than he need, fatter than he need, wearing odder garments than were justified either by poverty or by carelessness; and all the other men in the Dickens pub were, I think, also putting up this raffish-defiant act; cutting capers of comradeship when we all knew the comradeship was there and the capers superfluous; being boon companions as well as just company for each other.

I had intended to write these pages in mellow appreciation of Neil Lyons; they have come out, instead, as a savage bewildered protest against the convention that adversity ennobles and dignifies. But my friend wound up in all those scarves and pullovers had been a warm, affectionate, genial creature with a lovely gift for transcribing on paper all that was most warm and affectionate and genial and racily humorous in other men and women, so that the rest of us could share and enjoy the feast. Nobody reads what he has written now; but men and women all over the British Isles are behaving so much as he would have written about them, with all that gusto, gallantry, fun and good sense, that I can hardly

bear to think their most human historian is not writing and is not read.

*Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave,
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.*

So that, in this time of coincidence, the next book I picked up from my random assortment should certainly have been the poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay. It was near enough: Harold Monro's Poems, with a biography at the beginning showing that he, too, like Neil Lyons, had had little appreciation during his lifetime. Yet his poems proved how passionately he had himself appreciated life; week-ends in the country, friends and books and furniture; Saturday evenings with Sunday still to come; crossing the fields to bathe; the way the grain shone in the wood; giving milk to the cat.

Any cat we can remember in fiction is always a cat of character, though not always a pleasant character. The dog of fiction exists mostly as a quivering shape of devotion. But take Saki's Tobermory, what cold cynicism, what shrewd scornful understanding of human frailties are revealed when he condescends to express himself in our language. And hear the opinions of Rumer Godden's Citron when Ting-Ling, the Pekinese, was trying to write his autobiography for the benefit of posterity:

"'Have you nothing better to do with your Nights?' he would caterwaul. 'My Unmentionable Parts! Fancy *writing* at Night! Come with me, I'll show you. The nights are made for Lust. Lust! Lust! Lust!' He did a Tile Walk on the Window-Sill. 'Come along, Little Saint. Grow up!'"

We can only gain by making dogs articulate, because of

their mysterious devotion to man; what Rumer Godden calls Dog-Religion, the Mainspring of Dog Life. If cats could speak as we speak, the gain from the point of view of our self-esteem would be doubtful. (And if you have forgotten this, re-read Saki's "Tobermory.")

"'What do you think of human intelligence?' asked Mavis Pellington lamely.

"'Of whose intelligence in particular?' asked Tobermory coldly.

"'Oh, well, mine for instance,' said Mavis, with a feeble laugh.

"'You put me in an embarrassing position,' said Tobermory, whose tone and attitude certainly did not suggest a shred of embarrassment. 'When your inclusion in this house-party was suggested Sir Wilfrid protested that you were the most brainless woman of his acquaintance, and that there was a wide distinction between hospitality and the care of the feeble-minded. Lady Blemley replied that your lack of brain-power was the precise quality which had earned you your invitation, as you were the only person she could think of who might be idiotic enough to buy their old car. You know, the one they call "The Envy of Sisyphus," because it goes quite nicely uphill if you push it.' "

Our goats and our goldfish may intensely admire us, but on the other hand they, too, might prove caustic or indifferent. Many a man has been saved from an inferiority complex by that rapt worshipping gaze of spaniel, setter or Great Dane. I once had a little cat called Shoe Lane who had a really charming character, irrepressibly chummy and unselfconscious; a Pollyanna, a Pippa-passes personality. It has just occurred to me that Pippa was the first of a long line of Glad Girls, and that the formula for Browning's "Pippa Passes" was obviously the kick-off for that popular series of stories in which

various entirely different characters are held together by their use of the same train, liner, Pippa, hotel, bridge. You remember, how Pippa happened to pass singing under the window every time anyone was committing a murder or being rude to their mother. They said, "What the hell's that?" and stopped doing whatever it was; and by the time the innocent warbler had passed, the impulse to murder or whatever it was, had passed as well. A useful formula. Drew and I once planned a novel about a theatre in which not a single seat had been booked before noon, but by the evening the theatre was sold out, and every single person there had come for a different reason, and each reason was a chapter of the book. Yes, and "Sold Out" I think would be the title.

How can I lead myself back to Shoe Lane? We took her with us to live in Italy where the Italians all called her Tommi, for we were too weary and old to answer their frantic questions as to the origin of her existing name; besides, we did not know it ourselves. Something to do with the Hulton Press. Shoe Lane got on splendidly with our six dogs, and used to come running for walks whenever they did, and tripped along behind us, her tail held high, the tip waving slightly. One day she vanished; our Italian servants swore that our landlord, who lived at the foot of the mule-track, a nice man who adored animals, had killed her and eaten her in a pie. More than ten years later I met the man again at a dinner-party in Monte Carlo. Life since our last encounter had been so crowded and variable that even the little tragedy of Shoe Lane had been utterly eclipsed in my mind. Suddenly in a lull of the party an agonised foreign voice called down the whole length of the table: "Tell me, Pietra, you do not *still* believe, or do you, that I ate Tommi-the-Cat?"

Not unnaturally all the guests dealt rapidly with their incoming or outgoing spaghetti, and listened. By "dealt," I

mean they either clipped it off short with their teeth and let the rest fall, or made skilful absorbing movements with their lips and got it all covered. Eating spaghetti is like reading an author with too many relative clauses escaping loosely from the bulk of his sentences.

And at this point Paul came in—not in Italy, nor in Monte Carlo, of course. Remember we are staying with him at his house in a village in Essex. He was carrying two Persian cats and the hot water, and he said: "Drew's not up yet. Prunella's not awake yet. It's raining." And he dashed to see what I was reading. It was "Milk for the Cat" by Harold Monro, so he began to tell me how difficult it was to diet his Persians: they were so delicate they did not care for the English climate, so that hardly anybody ever succeeded in rearing them. I suggested: "I expect you could, if you settled in Persia." Paul argued contentiously: "If I did, once I had, I expect they would choke on a fishbone." I retorted amiably that Persia was an inland country, so there would be no fish. Paul scored a double in his reply that there were kippers in Switzerland (but *are* there?), and that Persia was on the Persian Gulf. Sinking a little lower on my pillows, I said with an air of infallibility that everybody knew no fish were ever caught in the Persian Gulf, because of the excess of salt.

We cannot have wandered far from the fish that were not in the Persian Gulf, to the subject of Paul's former cook-housekeeper, though I cannot remember the exact route; what I can remember was the extraordinary horror with which he described the genial buxom woman and her ways: "She made me wonderful puddings as a surprise, and she took such an interest, and painted the furniture when I wasn't looking and asked me how I liked it pink, and mended my socks standing there with a sock over one hand while she cheered me up by

telling me about other poor helpless men and their socks, and she lit fires everywhere and never minded the trouble—Oh, she was dreadful!" With a shudder Paul ended this amazing catalogue of vices. "Well, well," I murmured, "take your kittens and go away. I want to get up." "You needn't. It's raining." He departed.

The next book I opened was "Howards End"; but I know E. M. Forster's novels almost as well as I know Jane Austen's, and like Jane Austen he keeps his admirers on short rations. "Howards End" is dated by the picture it draws of the two "emancipated girls" of their day, Margaret and Helen; their emancipation is bright and new as a 1911 penny when it first came from the mint; Margaret's chatter has that voluble undergraduate geniality composed in equal parts of fearlessness and cocoa. On the other hand, there is nothing wrong with Margaret's wisdom; nor with her perception of what human beings do to each other once they cease connecting cause and effect, and treat every act as an act in itself, carefully removing the links that may fasten it to before and after and to what we might call the present-sideways. The essence of "Howards End," however, is in its picture of the Wilcox family: the Wilcox family are permanently valuable. Mr. Wilcox is the middle-class business man in the thousand- to three-thousand-a-year class: shrewd, material-minded, sensual, but using only one or two of his five senses; denying the abstract kingdoms of thought and elusive beauty; convinced of such enormous differences in men and women, their interests and their characters, that the world measured by his standards becomes fantastic to a degree of which, lacking the equipment, Mr. Wilcox could never become aware. His two sons and his daughter were of the same blood and bone. When I first read that the Wilcoxes "had their hands upon all the ropes and knew whom to send for," I felt as though I had seen Naples

and could die; I felt like Cortez silent upon a peak in Darien. For here were the Wilcoxes of England forever flood-lit. Here was the intangible difference between you and me on one side, and the Wilcoxes on the other (I can affirm this safely, for no Wilcox would be reading this book). "They have their hands on all the ropes, and know whom to send for." No amount of desperate inquiry beforehand will ever teach us whom to send for. But Mr. Wilcox knew already when he was a baby Wilcox sitting up in his perambulator; the meaning of those gurgling sounds from his infant lips, if properly interpreted, was: "If you're having trouble with Brown, you ought to go to Jones. Don't go to Robinson. Better go straight to headquarters always. Jones is the man you want. And be firm; these days, they don't understand kindness." Nevertheless, if Mr. Wilcox had to handle any emotional or psychological crisis, any situation when, so to speak, he had to send for himself, he remained helpless and bewildered to a degree that could only awake compassion, not scorn.

The titles of Sarah Orne Jewett's two collections of stories which I brought upstairs the night before, "The Country of the Pointed Firs" and "The Only Rose," suggest that she was both quaint and sentimental. I am no friend to trolls, so I had been rejecting them for some time. What do we mean when we say a writer is "quaint" or "whimsical"? So often we ask ourselves for a definition, and promptly get in return a little coloured picture. Thus when I say "quaint" to myself, I see either a Toby jug in a cottage window or else a little man in a pointed cap sitting crosslegged on a mushroom.

When I first read Sarah Orne Jewett, I was not aware of the long procession of New England authors winding towards me over the distant hill. Her New England air was, however, very much to my liking; so clean and bracing and salty; the characters and the phrasing so richly spiced. Over and over

again, in its sure and delicate placing, its irony, its humour, she reminds me less of Mrs. Gaskell than of Jane Austen. She sets about the debunking process with the same pleasure, and only melts into tenderness over her two favourite themes: hospitality and holiday, repeated like a fugue twisting in and out of the lives of her little isolated group of women; for they are mostly women, and mostly beyond middle age; tough, kind, shrewd, prickly and courageous. Hospitality is given an almost oriental importance, and its omission is an unforgivable sin. Many of her characters lived in what were then high and inaccessible places, so that a real physical effort was required of the visitor, and, in consequence, gratitude flowed from the hostess and widened the banks of her welcome.

Yes, they had backbone, these New England women. They needed it for their struggle with poverty which by some magical dyeing process is never, in these stories, colourless and dreary. Often their greatest distress was an unsatisfied longing to see the world:

"I knowed of a woman that went clean round the world when she was past eighty, an' enjoyed herself real well. . . . She died to home between v'y'ges . . . might 'a' been alive an' enjoyin' of herself a good many years but for the kick of a cow."

But in spite of the example of this intrepid old lady, in spite of so much zest for life and experiences and travel, "holiday," for those single-hearted countryfolk of Maine, frequently meant no more than a day's outing. But how they enjoyed their outings, and what wisdom they drew from every fresh contact! Strong rooty wisdoms; for Sarah Orne Jewett had an understanding of hardship as though in every case she had been through the experience herself, though in actual fact her life had been warm and rounded by comfort and appreciation. But she knew the people of that fierce shore and

stubborn countryside; for years she observed them in their daily life, and then she put out an unerring finger for selection.

Joseph K. Laneway, big man of the little village of Winby, returns to visit his humble birthplace:

He had always liked to refer to his early life in New England in his political addresses, and had spoken more than once of going to find the cows at nightfall in the autumn evenings, and being glad to warm his bare feet in the places where the sleepy beasts had lain, before he followed their slow steps homeward through bush and brier.

(How did Miss Jewett know of this desperate expedient?) He is greeted by old Abby Hender, who had been his childish sweetheart: "Come right in, Joe. Why, I should know you anywhere! Why, Joe Laneway, *you same boy!*" And we are conscious of a quick glow of delight for the spontaneous rightness of the phrase. In this author, the power of selection was as great as the power of creative invention in another. Listen again:

Now and then a toiling child would rise and come down the aisle, with his forefinger firm upon a puzzling word as if it were an unclassified insect.

Not only by this touch does she bring one village school vivid before us, but every village school of every age and country, where youth must slowly, suspiciously, learn to read.

The ultimate lesson of these two volumes, if one can apply so dry a word as "lesson," is to make one discontented with one's own discontent. And for justification of my own private delight, I should like to introduce you to Mr. Bickford:

"Mr. Bickford was partial to sweet-williams," said Mrs. Bickford. "I never knew him to take notice of no other sort of flowers.

When we'd be over to Eliza's, he'd walk down her garden, an' he'd never make no comments until he come to them, and then he'd say, 'Those is sweet-williams.' How many times I've heard him."

Mr. Bickford is a long while dead even before the story begins, and we hear no more of him than in this one paragraph where, surely, he lives for ever.

Yes, I prefer these books of Sarah Orne Jewett to "Cranford," though it may be simply because there are no sea breezes, no salt sea winds, nor salt sea smells in Mrs. Gaskell's little country town in Cheshire. Yet we may recall that in "Cranford" also there are passages of brisk irony, especially when Miss Pole is giving tongue, which contradicts the supposition of manly men (who have never read it) that it must be a story all of caps and bonnets and feminine tattle:

"Well," said Miss Pole, sitting down with the decision of a person who has made up her mind as to the nature of life and the world (and such people never tread lightly, or seat themselves without a bump), "well, Miss Matty! men will be men. Every mother's son of them wishes to be considered Samson and Solomon rolled into one—too strong ever to be beaten or discomfited—too wise ever to be outwitted. If you will notice, they have always foreseen events, though they never tell one for one's warning before the events happen. My father was a man, and I know the sex pretty well."

And no chapter of any novel of modern events describing the spread of rumour could rival that pungent story of what happened at Cranford when a foreigner and a conjuror, Signor Brunoni, came to stay with them. Nor call up a more topical picture than the scene where Miss Matty browses over a letter in which her sister has described England's preparations against invasion:

I can't quite remember the date, but I think it was in 1805 that Miss Jenkyns wrote the longest series of letters—on occasion of her absence on a visit to some friends near Newcastle-upon-Tyne. These

friends were intimate with the commandant of the garrison there, and heard from him of all the preparations that were being made to repel the invasion of Buonaparte, which some people imagined might take place at the mouth of the Tyne. Miss Jenkyns was evidently very much alarmed; and the first part of her letters was often written in pretty intelligible English, conveying particulars of the preparations which were made in the family with whom she was residing against the dreaded event; the bundles of clothes that were packed up ready for flight to Alston Moor (a wild hilly piece of ground between Northumberland and Cumberland); the signal that was to be given for this flight, and for the simultaneous turning out of the volunteers under arms—which said signal was to consist (if I remember rightly) in ringing the church bells in a particular and ominous manner. . . .

“But, indeed, my dear, they were not at all trivial or trifling at the time. I know I used to wake up in the night many a time and think I heard the tramp of the French entering Cranford. Many people talked of hiding themselves in the salt mines—and meat would have kept capitally down there, only perhaps we should have been thirsty. And my father preached a whole set of sermons on the occasion; one set in the mornings, all about David and Goliath, to spirit up the people to fighting with spades or bricks, if need were; and the other set in the afternoons, proving that Napoleon (that was another name for Bony, as we used to call him) was all the same as an Apollyon and Abaddon. I remember my father rather thought he should be asked to print this last set; but the parish had, perhaps, had enough of them with hearing.”

It gives one a peculiar twist at the heart, a wry twist but not far from laughter, to come across these gentle reminiscences wrapped round with Indian muslin, with sarsenet and bombazine. Mrs. Gaskell must have heard about the church bells from some older relation and passed it on. She could certainly never have dreamt that by an almost too whimsical circumstance, the reader who paused at this page to look up and murmur, “Fancy,” should be alert to hear church bells in England which might announce an even less pleasurable inva-

sion. Had she lived and written earlier than 1840, however, during those actual years when martello towers were built, and "Boney will get you" was the slogan used to frighten every child, would she, I wonder, have let these allusions slip onto the pages of her story? Or would she, like Jane Austen, have courteously ignored the whole distressing business? Nothing could be more admirable than Miss Austen's attitude towards England at war against the tyrant Buonaparte. She had her story to tell; and, except for one or two references to gallant captains and prize ships, the war had nothing to do with her story or her characters. One can be sure that in her actual life she was no escapist. In her novels, we cannot be at all sure if she deliberately left out death and danger (what a fuss, say her detractors, *what* a fuss about a fall from a Cobb at Lyme Regis!) or whether she was so much of an artist and so absorbed in her mood of creation that it was impossible for her to introduce a martello tower, say in Mr. Woodhouse's shrubbery, unless her story and her characters inevitably demanded a martello tower in Mr. Woodhouse's shrubbery. (Though what Mr. Woodhouse would have said! You will remember that Emma and Mr. Knightley were only allowed to marry because Mr. Woodhouse's nervous system reacted favourably to the idea of a tall son-in-law in the house, after he heard that Mrs. Weston's poultry-house was robbed one night of all her turkeys.) The predicament of the author today and the dramatist and the film producer, is surely much the same as it must have been then, except that a few odd little inventions like wireless and aeroplanes make it slightly more difficult to carry on with our lives in Highbury or Cranford as though nothing were happening that might trip up the daily round. I am inclined to think that what the majority of audiences and readers long for, nowadays, is for the actual "nowadays" to be avoided, but for the substance to be alive; we are in no

state to be fed on gossamer. Give us reality and, if you can, laughter. Shakespeare did not often bring in our wars with Spain, though he sometimes wrote of wars and sometimes not. When he did, the psychology was as true for us as for the Elizabethans, or for Miss Matty, rolling a ball under her bed to make sure that the foreign conjuror, doubtless an enemy spy, was not occupying that swept but ungarnished space.

Escape is surely legitimate when it only means a brief while to relax and forget, before we return again to our job. But we must not fail to take a return ticket, for fable shows us that the longing to escape from life and its responsibilities lies so deep in the human soul that nothing can clear it out altogether. We escape into childhood, into reverie, into the past, into dreams of the future, into make-believe and self-delusion, into love, into gardens and novels and picture palaces and hobbies and lunatic asylums. Yet fable shows us too that Orpheus and Lot's wife were told to walk straight ahead and not look back; they looked back and paid the penalty; interpreted symbolically, if we refuse to walk onward we miss life and are turned into pillars of salt. Escapism might equally account for the fable of "You mustn't ask his name" as well as "You mustn't look back over your shoulder." Psyche asked Cupid his name; Elsa asked Lohengrin. Nor was Rumpelstiltskin allowed to tell his name. (Or was it that he wilfully kept it secret, for power's sake?) Queer, those prohibition legends. Thinking them over, I cannot really fit them in with escapism, much as I enjoy fitting anything into anything.

Musing on Lot's wife sent me back with a certain amount of curiosity to that surprising chapter in Genesis in which the Old Testament stress on hospitality is carried to such extremes that Lot thought nothing of putting his daughters out on the porch as a sop to the males of Sodom, provided they left his visitors alone. It might be an understatement to say that he

was a lenient papa. Definitely, on re-reading that part of Genesis, I found myself saying: "I don't like Lot, and if Lot was the best they could find to save out of Sodom, *well!*" Lot was the type who made us ever afterwards dislike the word "righteousness," and Mrs. Lot and the Misses Lot must have had a thin time. If one abandoned oneself wholly to conjecture and to reading between the lines, an interesting study might be made of the wives and daughters of the Patriarchs, their home lives and their private opinions. The Patriarch and the Victorian Papa, similar in many ways, were dissimilar in that the Victorian Papa—Mr. Barrett of Wimpole Street, Mr. Bultitude, Mr. Pontifex, Mr. Voysey, Mr. Fairchild, Mr. Pope—had, in Jane Austen phraseology, a nice sense of propriety regarding his family. It may be that Mrs. Lot, poor soul, was not looking back out of lewd curiosity and disobedience to the Lord; but because she was a warm-hearted domestic creature who had given much of her heart to her home and pots and pans, and was simply yearning back after them even in the city of fire and brimstone, knowing well that an atmosphere of comfort and familiarity takes years to establish, and that she was not likely to get much help from that tall righteous figure stalking along ahead of her, the back of his conceited neck complacent with the knowledge that he had been chosen as the only man worth saving from punishment. Perhaps she thought, "How silly the back of his neck looks!" Perhaps she thought of those pink vases encrusted with blue and gilt forget-me-nots, a Present from Gomorrah. Poor Mrs. Lot, poor évacuée from home, poor pillar of salt; her daughters can never have meant much to her; obviously "Daddy's girls," otherwise she would not have let them be put out on the porch. If she had been anything of a virago, she would have exclaimed, "You two girls, you go straight on

upstairs!" and to Lot: "I don't know what you were thinking of. Call yourself a father!"

No, we cannot link up either Lot or his wife with escapism, except in its most literal sense; but that is escape, not escapism; the *ism* turns what is exciting and adventurous into something quite different, a neurotic desire not to face up to life. During the present war, a play called "Thunder Rock," which shows signs of being as much an interpretation of 1940 as "Journey's End" was of 1914, handles this very subject with a queer blend of fascination and extreme care, as though the dramatist were, so to speak, afraid that the theme might explode in his hands. Having selected his magnificent theme, he might in the last act have let it rip a bit more, as we are living through a period when understatement is no longer a gentlemanly fashion, and everything can be let rip except unworthy panic. "Thunder Rock" shows us two idealists living in the modern world; one of them knows he has to do his share against catastrophe and confusion, however little and futile his personal share may seem to be; but the other has thought too long on the subject and has removed himself and his thoughts to a solitary lighthouse, an ivory tower in symbolism, and imagines having geographically severed himself from humanity and struggle, from everything, indeed, except life itself, that geographical escape is enough, and that he can continue to live remote with no other friendship than a set of ghosts which his own brain has shaped and kneaded into the next-best thing to life itself. I am not sure, from a first reading of this play, whether the by-issue of this slightly Pirandello, somewhat "Outward Bound," symbolism resolves itself finally into the decision that ghosts are not quite enough, or that ghosts are a shade too much. But the dramatist's ultimate conclusion, apart from this slight blur in the middle,

comes out clearly enough: that, forwards, sideways or backwards, there is no escape for any man once he knows how to think. Once he knows how to think, he will have to identify himself with the struggle, however useless it may seem, however confused and catastrophic; his lighthouse, his isolation, his ivory tower are worse than useless, and the very ghosts whom he has ruthlessly re-created from the past will prove traitors to his act of escape, rescuers against his will to release him from his illusion. Of course, if he had left them where they were in limbo, he might have been able to carry on a bit longer, petulantly free of all responsibility; but it was no good, he must keep company, so, like Pygmalion, he created his own; only to learn from them that a man must keep company with the period in which life has been allotted to him, however repulsive; and that a man alive in 1940 must walk out with 1940 like a happy coster with his girl, and not walk out on her like a hypersensitive lover.

Yet I dare not say how this would work out were the hero of the problem (using the word "hero" as a convenience and not in description) possessed of a genuine creative gift. A genuine creative gift may be more deeply rooted in reality than even what seem to be the noisier surrounding realities. On the other hand, the creative gift may be so involved with whatever is going on, that to isolate it and carry it away, guarding it from the danger of being extinguished as though it were precious as the flame of the Unknown Warrior, might in itself extinguish it, before, so to speak, the creator even reached his far-off lighthouse.

But what fun the Crusades must have been, when escapism, heroism, war and religion, the desire to travel, the longing to get away from your wife, the "Richard-O-my-king" stuff, plus a liking for horses and a warmer climate, could all be made to work in together, instead of conflicting and can-

celling one another and pulling different ways. Even now the very word "Crusades" sends a series of little pictures slipping along one's mind, brilliantly coloured and full of novelty and attraction. To go to the Crusades, for knight, squire or page, from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, must have been every bit as good as living through a Wild West film at the beginning of the twentieth. And who would have dared tell a Crusader that he was merely an escapist? Often he was not; but no less often the words were synonymous. Richard Cœur de Lion, for many years at school my favourite hero, on more mature consideration might easily have been the type who found that being King of England restricted him to a round of petty duties which might just as well be discharged by his younger brother John.

During illness, when the brain desires to read no more than a mixture of nonsense and wish-fulfilment written with earnest plausibility, I can always take pleasure for a few days in the sort of story where two people perform an extraordinary act called "changing places." Changing places must be almost, if not entirely, fabulous; I cannot begin to imagine what made it one of the seven themes of fiction. In these stories, a rich society *débutante* and her maid change places, or a millionaire and his secretary; or (written by Mark Twain) a young prince and a pauper gutter-urchin. It hardly even involves similarity of looks; just escapism made to look as deliciously easy as "the cat sat on the mat" altered to "the mat sat on the cat." But imagine for a moment, even out of wartime, your own life with all its million tendrils, adhesions and complications, and then imagine the absurdity of saying to someone equally weary of it all, "Let's change places"—and you will wonder, as I now do, how I could ever have scribbled a rough note on it: "What sells best is wish-fulfilment within a *possible* range." The changing-places theme of escapism

nearly always sells; it is obviously wish-fulfilment, but obviously impossible. Otherwise "Let's change places" would be the escapists' slogan, as much as "Let's go to the Crusades." We are on a crusade today, but we spell it with a small *c* and leave it in the singular.

Nowadays, too, geography has joined in the general restlessness. At the time when every place on the map stayed quietly where it should, it was easy to escape to the East, to the West, to the Spanish Main, to Klondike, to big-game shootin' in Central Africa; but now the latest atlas is already quaint and old-world by the Wednesday after we have bought it.

I once knew a man who had a charming roomy house, roomy without being gaunt, but who built for himself what he called "a little pavilion" at the end of his garden; not a pavilion in the sense of Francis Thompson's "red pavilion of the heart"; nor one with Regency Brighton associations; nor even a good place from which lazily to watch the best cricket; nor one where ladies who had lent their sleeves to a knight to wear, sat in a pavilion and watched tourneys, and ate doughnuts sticky with jam when they were bored, and hamburgers, and ice-cream from a stop-me-and-buy-one . . . But to go back to the little house in the garden of the big house: I asked the famous man why he had let his house spawn in this fashion, and he replied: "Well, you see, sometimes I go down there and sleep because I like to get away." His answer fascinated me. To get away from what? To get away from the big house which was arranged and decorated to his own liking, and with which he was not in the least dissatisfied? To get away from the irrepressible clatter of domesticity? But though he had plenty of visitors and friends and family in and out, he actually lived alone except for the staff. "I like to get away from life as symbolised by the large house, back to the smaller cosier womb." Is it really our old friend escapism so simply

expressed that we hardly recognise it? It cannot be peculiar to this one man, for I also knew a woman who had a villa in the South of France and then in Bermuda, and always built a smaller one across the garden. When she sold the bigger and lived in the smaller, she would quickly build an even smaller one. Wendy sat up after Tootles' arrow had laid her flat, and suddenly began to sing: "I wish I had a tiny house, the littlest ever seen . . ." In this greatest escapist fable ever written, Barrie might have been expressing a sardonic truth hidden as usual in a thicket of whimsy: the fundamental need of most of us to revert to a childish state when the big house was inhabited by authority and wisdom and prohibitions, and scoop out a small safe shelter at the other end of the garden or in the treetops; safe and small: "the littlest ever seen"—exact reproduction of solemn-earnest, on a miniature scale.

The rain was heavy and violent as a brief thundershower, only it continued all that morning of our week-end in Essex, instead of clearing up swiftly and suddenly to a sky of blue silk and trees shaking and flashing with raindrops in the brilliant sun; the rain slashed at the trees, at the air and at the duckpond without respite. Two of our quartette decided firmly to stay indoors; and Paul and I decided firmly to take the car and drive through Essex in the rain. Essex in the rain was unexpectedly attractive, and not nearly as flat as it is unjustly labelled: "Essex is so flat," people say. The village where Paul lived had real charm and did not know it, a thing to be commended in English villages (yes, you know the three I mean which are perpetually curtseying to their own charm).

A little way farther on, I suddenly saw a signboard pointing across a meadow. It announced without pretension: "Bridlepath to Pleshey." I found this enchanting: a bridlepath if called by any other name would not smell nearly as wet and

mossy and green: Lord Wyfold in his Antiquarian Notes says of the bridlepath: "They are usually just wide enough for two mounted men to pass, not as we do today, keeping to the left, but probably 'bridle hand to bridle hand,' to lessen the danger of a sword thrust or stab in the back." But to me "bridle-path" meant all the dappled ponies and the ponies with long white tails that I had never been given for Christmas or on my birthday as a child, though other, luckier, less London children were given them; "bridlepath" meant the sound of horses' hoofs, and the sudden gleam, between the trees, of satiny bay and chestnut flanks; "bridlepath" meant Kipling's "They shut the road through the woods seventy years ago." "Bridlepath" meant certainly where motor-cars would not drive, and where bluebells might burn into amazing colour and die down in perfect sanctuary. "Bridlepath to Pleshey" meant water, too; that was the Pleshey part of it, the splash and splash of water, ponds, pools and puddles and running brooks. "Bridlepath to Pleshey" meant, finally, a hundred thousand walks all over England that I had thought wistfully I might enjoy on foot, having no seat on a horse; but a hundred thousand walks which remained unwalked by me.

And here rose a memory of the moors in the North of England, where Paul had once branched off from the wide road, saying that he was not sure, but he believed that this narrower road might bring us out on to some other enchanted moor: were we willing to take the risk? We were perfectly willing, of course; you have to be, if you do not drive yourself. The narrower road became steeper; then laid down all pretence of being a road at all, and turned into a cart-track; and then hardly even that. It was so steep and so little of a road that perhaps one cart might have dragged up it, groaning, several weeks ago. "I don't know where we're coming to," said Paul, who rarely spoke an unnecessary line; but he did then: "At

any rate, we can't turn here." The moors in the North of England are so beautiful that Freda and I hardly cared. We had been nourished on beauty all day and all yesterday, so we were acquiescent and lazy. Here are some rough notes which I have recently found, summing up the contentment of those brief days:

TO THE NORTH (signpost)

At sunset, dark golden moors slanting across purplish black ones, or damson-blue. Wide stretches beyond Alston towards Catterick. Dazzling white houses with dull red doors. And dykes (grey stone walls) laid in a cross on the slopes.

The distant moors, one folded behind the other. Green in the foreground, and tawny gold. Then purple and heather-coloured. Behind that, plum-blue, almost black. And behind, a dim smoky blue. [Already at this juncture readers will no doubt wish I had mislaid my colour-box.]

Small rabbits slipping gaily to and fro across the road of the lane. [The mystery has not been solved to date, as to what I *meant* by "the road of the lane."]

The menacing effect of tall prim columns of white smoke from the tall chimneys in an industrial village: patterns and whorls of white on an iron-grey sky.

The greyhound round leaping and switchbacking into space, and then down and on again into space, Dere Street and Watling Street, straight over the Border into Scotland at Carter Bar.

In the lowlands of Scotland, shoulders and waves of plain green hills laid one across another at Moss Paul. All different greens (like when you try to match navy blue). Patches of grass and moss and fern. One dark hill, nearly black, behind them all.

On the way home, every now and then, a flight of grouse, in a covey of seven or eight; warm comfortable brown plumage.

The scampering sheep with black legs, from the moorland roads. Grey stones left sticking out as steps in the walls, for the sheep to climb. A shepherd in a motor-car grandly following the flock and two dogs.

Driving back through Glen [I can't read this] of a mountain shoulder thick with white snow, and the sun on it from *behind* a flying mist. In the sky, a hole of pure blue, widening and tearing.

Black and white posts, to show above snowdrifts in winter. And a derelict snow-plough, looking like half an iron boat.

A flight of swallows in a wheeling circle over the distant moors. Banks of blue harebells (or a profusion of) trembling on delicate stems.

Brown clear streams and falls, curling in the distance. The one dark tree alone in the foreground. The ghostly mist round the Brontë house. Not really Brontë house but should have been from its looks. Utter loneliness. Forlorn to the very bone. Suddenly a van, Jackson's of Piccadilly, drives out from behind house. (Unlikely to be Brontës' house.)

We stop on the moor. Sudden smell of peat and moss, and the chuckle and sob of the stream just there. The low arch of grey stone bridges over rivers in spate. Bursts of silver sun dripping from the edge of dark thunderclouds. And a shaft of sun across Skiddaw.

Cow episode.

Here the brevity of rough notes comes to an end. There are moments, however, when they cannot do full justice to memory. These are the details of the "cow episode":

The gradient ran up at an acute angle. At the top of the lane stood a large red cow waiting to receive us, blocking the way. Her eyes rolled wildly. Had she the gift of speech, she would have said, "At last, at last!" or "Is King George still on

the throne?" or "Kiss me, Hardy"—the latter as nearly as possible, for she fell for Paul in a big way. He told us carefully and precisely that he disliked cows (which I knew to be a fact), so would either of us care to get out of the car and shoo this one away, so that we could go on? Smiling indolently, we said we would rather stay in the car, thank you. It was braked at a horribly steep angle, but the way that cow's eyes were rolling was nobody's business. So Paul climbed out. And Paul and the cow began to dance a minuet. His idea was to shoo the cow away—but the minuet was the cow's idea. They bowed and curtsied and moved three paces to the left, then three to the right and back again. Versailles and all that. Freda and I were fascinated; we would not have missed it for worlds. Presently, and all too soon for us, Paul returned to the car and said: "It's no good; I shall have to back it downhill. There's only a farmyard ahead, and that's too sticky with mud even to try and turn." Dusk began to drop in tender romantic folds. The gap widened between the cow and the car, as we moved backwards and downwards. She stood where we had first seen her, staring with incredulous eyes. "Parting" was the name of that picture. Some harsh critics might have called it too pretty-pretty; but as Freda and I saw it, dispassionately, it was an occasion of real stark tragedy. "O my love!" cried the cow. "You're not *going*, my love?" cried the cow. "Why, you've only just come. I've waited for years and years, and now only one dance!" cried the cow. "Not even a cup of tea, with milk or without?" No use; still the gap widened. Yet she did not follow us, aware perhaps that pursuit and lament never made a girl seem more attractive. Her attitude, rigid, immobile, expressing that she was chiefly incredulous, and that despair would come later, was summed up by Freda in a characteristic little phrase: "Watching life recede."

And here is a contrasting memory of driving with Paul. This time there were no cows and no minuets. We were returning to London at about five o'clock, early in February, along a modern road of factories on either side, as romantic in that pale misty lighting as any path across the moor. Advertisements of corsets, tires, nail-polish, bathing-costumes, gramophone records were thrown in thin fire against the muted opal; and pale lemon lights of traffic signals, unnaturally large; three carefully thought-out jade-green necklaces of light looped on either side of the broad concrete. The severe white buildings stood in rectangular blocks coldly and proudly spaced, as unlike the old style of squalid, cosy, huddled factories as New York's Empire State Building is unlike the Monument in Dickens' London. It seems amazing that a drive along a factory road should only call up words like "mysterious," "strange," "romantic" and "magical," instead of "uncompromising" and "utilitarian"; yet in actual fact, and as we have already discovered from our twentieth-century painters and poets, and from the sight of aeroplanes hurling themselves across the bare sky and over the bare Downs, this bare new world is a breathless subject for their handling. And I watched in silence the luminous lines of crocus and flame and violet, slim and swift as the follow after a hare in flight, picking out the signs on the factories; edging them with such economy as almost to defeat their purpose, for the eye can hardly follow the pursuit before it comes round again, if indeed it should come round again and not be fresh fire inexhaustible.

(Yes, I am aware that this is a Purple Patch. There are moments when it's just too bad about purple patches.)

We passed a shop with the name of Luckin over the door. I thought that an exciting name, a name out of a village

fairy-tale. Paul, a resident of Essex, stated that it was a usual name in those parts. "But it's like Rumpelstiltskin," I said, being quaint and silly. "The sort of name you mustn't tell or you'll be unlucky for the rest of your life." Not wholly without logic, Paul replied: "In that case, they would hardly have put it up over the door."

Snubbed, I meditated silently on the theme of luck. We have all felt in our lives the acute difference between luck-in and luck-out: "Your luck's in. My luck's out." We are quite helpless during our unluckin periods, when there comes always a slip between the cup and the lip; but then suddenly those periods end, and with an almost physical sensation, like a rush of wind through your hair, that exhilarating sequence of luck begins. The strong desire which lies deep in all of us to be lucky rather than good must derive from the oldest of traditions: that if you are favoured by the gods no harm can come to you. Gold and jewels and palaces and lackeys and all the more cumbersome baggage of luck is not so fair as luck itself, fugitive and capricious, yet again and again reaffirming and justifying your first happy secret idea that you, yourself, for a while at least, are somehow and somewhere beloved from the very seat of luck. If you are not lucky you are isolated, you are desolate, you are a pariah; luck ignores you, luck cuts you dead, luck may never return, luck swerves away from you but always and always visits the others; you are pelted with instances of bad luck as though you were being pelted with stones on a desolate sterile shore. But luck-in—ah, while your luck is in, you are running barefoot upon grass in the warm sunshine; you are running with a shout towards the sea.

I knew an old lady who in talk about our mutual friends, although she did not exaggerate in any other way, when they had a stroke of luck always multiplied it to seem taller and wider than it actually was; but when their luck was small and

precarious, she was curiously compelled to nibble it all away, depreciate it by little fibs and falsifications, until of the small and precarious substance none was left. She was in herself kind and shrewd and valiant in her reactions to life, and was a kind, shrewd, valiant friend to all who knew her well, so that I was perplexed over this tendency of hers, till at last it occurred to me that she was compelled to wait until luck reached proportions worth heightening, until luck was glowing and perfect, before hailing it. She loved sensuously and unselfishly the sight of her friends' luck when it was the size of Popocatepetl; but when it was only tiny and brittle as blown shells it exasperated her, so that the same unselfish instinct, working the other way, compelled her to destroy it altogether.

I have an absurd impulse to call certain presents "lucky" directly they appear, and am never afterwards able to shake off the idea: a small cornelian fish bought for me in the Burlington Arcade; a heavy rope of polished beads looking like a hundred shades of walnut, brought me by Rebecca West from San Francisco (dragon's bones, she said they were, roughly speaking—less roughly, that they were carved and shaped and polished by the Chinese from the bones of mammoths); an old gold circle set with seven white sapphires which Somerset Maugham brought me from India. It had belonged to a Ranee who wore it between her eyes; but, careful that I should not make myself too conspicuous, he had had it mounted as a clip. A native expert testified exactly in which directions the sapphires, the tiny turquoises and tiny red rubies would guard me from bad luck. Since the war began I have placed it, foolishly perhaps, in the safe at my bank, where no doubt, throwing upwards from underground, it exudes surprising radiations of Indian luck among the bank staff. I have also two

lucky ash trays and two lucky paperweights, and a lucky walking-stick which had once belonged to a fine bull.

That this luck-finding habit has become cumbersome, I can show by merely pouring out and running through the contents of a small purse in faded red and gilt leather which I carry about with me everywhere in my handbag. The purse itself I labelled lucky, to begin with; it was the first present given to me off the tree during our first Christmas in Italy, in 1923. Inside the purse is a South African half-crown with "Suid-Afrika, 2½ shillings" circling the arms of South Africa: "This will bring you luck," someone had said, I forget who. Next, picked up at random from the table in front of me, another half-crown, this given me by an Irish friend for luck, with Eire's horse graven on one side and Eire's harp on the other. About the same size as these two half-crowns, but startling in comparison when you lift it, for it feels so light and trivial, is a tinny sort of medal with "Ricordo di Milano" on the back, and A. Suchewski, 1906, September 12, stamped on the other side round an impression of Milan cathedral. A very odd token. I can only with an effort remember the incident which happened when I was sixteen and at school at Montreux: My parents stayed at a lakeside hotel so that I could be with them for my holidays; and I fell sumptuously in love with a Russian whose name, obviously, must have been A. Suchewski. Dimly I can visualise a balcony and, like W. B. Yeats, hear lake water lapping and feel hands drawing me against a too burly chest while A. Suchewski murmurs some Chekhov wistfulness about going back to Moscow. Restless fellow, he had only just come back from Italy; hence the farewell gift from Milan. "This will bring you luck, douschka" (I hope he said douschka). And the ricordo di Milano was pressed into my hot palm. Hold it for fourteen years (as

Tennyson almost said in his poem on the Defence of Lucknow) ! I have held it for thirty-four ! Laying aside Suchewski, we pick up the inevitable little medal of St. Christopher, protection to all who drive in cars. Then there is a threepenny bit with Zar engraved on one side of it and the head of Kruger on the other. I can recall clearly who gave me that; hardly surprising, for it was sent along quite recently for my fiftieth birthday, from the same friend who gave me the wineglasses. Her sincere desire that it would bring me luck, though not realised on the date itself, which was June 17, 1940 (yes, we have not forgotten yet), might have functioned personally, not nationally, six weeks later, when I successfully came through a very severe operation. Contemplating the head of Kruger set me off on such an orgy of Boer War reminiscences as would clear any room in three minutes. "Oom Paul, we used to call him," I began, almost with affection, because from this distance and among present comparisons, Kruger could hardly be felt as a bogey-man, "That only means Uncle Paul, you know; Oom isn't his Christian name."

Here, among other lucky coins in my purse, is one and six which I distinctly remember winning honourably on a bet with H. G. Wells at a house-party in Wiltshire, some four Easters ago. I emphasise "honourably," because the matter concerned was a quotation from one of his own early books; he thought he knew better, and I knew I did, and luckily the book was on a shelf in the library. And he had to fork out. I had tried to raise it to five shillings because I was so sure, but he became cautious too soon. "I won't spend this in any large way," I declared; "I'll keep it for luck." And it went into the faded little Italian purse.

Two more shillings, the most recent of all my lucky collection, was won from my surgeon on another bet, as to whether H. G. Wells had ever in his career been a doctor or not;

money for jam, that was! "And it'll bring me luck," I said. Here is one solitary dime from the United States of America, pregnant with associations of that strange period in 1933 when they suddenly closed all the banks without warning, and we were left, in Hollywood, with just what we happened to have in our pockets or sewn in our mattresses, and roved about crooning the popular Bing Crosby song of the moment: "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" A Maundy Penny should have been there in the purse, but was not, which puzzled me till I remembered that I had probably left it in a small walnut lettercase in my flat in London. I had lost it too often from the purse; it was so small, a silver spangle of a penny, not half the size of the old threepenny bit. Gil gave it to me on an impulse of purest generosity when she was a child and her father was Canon of Westminster, on that Maundy Thursday when it was decided to revive the custom of distributing Maundy money in the Abbey. But of this (I warned you, gentle reader, that I should have no hesitation in using this phrase to help us on our way through the volume), of this, more hereafter.

Finally, a threepenny bit dated 1888. I can remember no reason for keeping it nor why it should be lucky, except that I was born in 1890, and so if my mother had been an elephant . . .

Presently I shall have something to say about elephants and me and luck.

Let it be clearly understood, however, that I am not superstitious. I repeat it in defiance of those who may have seen me throw salt over my shoulder three times in the very teeth (literally) of the Dowager Duchess sitting at the next supper table. I am not superstitious. It is silly to be superstitious. We are not in the Middle Ages now. Naturally I do not walk under ladders nor omit to say good-morrow to a magpie; natu-

rally, if I meet a horseshoe in a field four miles from home, I pass it (and a mile farther on, go back for it). But these are simple matters of common sense and hygiene.

As for touch wood, if you think in these days I would take the risk of lifting my hand from wood for one moment . . .

But I am not superstitious.

Once upon a time, I was on my way to a cocktail party, and I had decided to walk, hoping it would stimulate my crestfallen morale. A high sea-wind was irrelevantly blowing in Berkeley Square. As I beat my way along, I passed an especially exquisite lady of my acquaintance who was standing by her car superintending the bestowal of a frail package. She smiled and bowed, and I smiled and bowed, and managed to slide past.

But scarcely had I got past her, in the high sea-wind blowing down Bruton Street, when something did happen: A buxom, gipsyish woman, huddled in a shawl and carrying a basket, shot across from the other side of the road and hurled herself straight athwart my path, holding out a piece of white heather in one hand, thrusting it up in my face, and calling out as I tried to avoid her charging impetus: "I'm giving you this, lady, Gawd 'elp me I am, because I want you to have it. 'Ere, take it, lady, and it'll bring you good luck! I'm giving it to you. You can't say No."

Of course I couldn't say No to white heather and good luck. Just behind, and within easy hearing and seeing distance of three feet, my elegant acquaintance delayed at the door of her car, and was no doubt sweetly interested in what was happening to me.

"Thank you," I murmured, feeble but polite. "Good-bye!"

The gipsy woman grabbed my wrist in an iron grip, and thrust her bosom well into mine.

"I'm the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, lady. I'm

one of the Lee family. And what I'm telling you is true. I don't want anything from you, but give me ten shillings and I'll put a charm over the man you love that he'll turn to you, lady, as he's never done before. You're in love with a dark man, lady—well, not so dark; between-colours. Ten shillings as true as we're standing here, and I'll put a charm on him."

Nothing, certainly, could have been truer than that we were standing there, she and I. I could not move an inch; I could not scream for the police to remove her; she was absolutely adhesive. Passers-by were fascinated.

"Give me a pound, lady"—the price had gone up—"and I'll put a charm on him that he'll love you as you've never been loved before. You won't say No to that. The white heather I've given you, and it will bring you good luck; but you've got a great wish in your heart, and if you'll only give me a pound—"

"I haven't got a pound, honestly I haven't." And I added presently: "On me." (But I had a great wish in my heart. Who hasn't?)

The gipsy woman managed, while still holding her basket half supported on her hip and half on mine, to twist off my glove without letting go of my wrist. She took a good look at the palm of my hand and foretold riches and my heart's desire coming to me from across water. There was not a single worn-out cliché in the whole fortune-telling equipment which she spared me as we stood there locked together, while my cocktail party became a fading mirage of sanity and safety. I was getting desperate.

Her eyes were light grey; Ancient Mariner sort of eyes. I did not much like the smell that came from the shawl; but her breath, praise be to Heaven, was all right.

"Give me ten shillings, lady," she wheedled, dropping the idea of a pound, "and I'll put the charm on him."

One has to be honest with oneself; I terribly wanted to give her ten shillings. Naturally, I did not believe that she could put charms on between-coloured gentlemen, but if anyhow I had to give her something to get rid of her, to put an end to this preposterous clinch, and if I made it the sum she asked for, at least (all you who-are-not-superstitious-either will agree with me), at least there would be a faint tang in one's existence during the next few days; a tang like a strange sea-wind in Berkeley Square; a ridiculous hope that somebody was doing something about something in one's fate which might lead to something nice; a savour of illusion, of remote faith in miracles; a swift memory, sternly to be suppressed each time it rose, of tales heard here and there of what this Romany race could do once they got started.

Yet, against this unworthy longing for illegitimate excitement, a chorus rose in my mind of all my sensible strong-minded friends and relations saying: "God, you're not thinking of actually *giving* her that ten shillings? God, even you can't be quite such a fool! She's just trying it on. All you had to do was to tell the woman, once and for all, that unless she lets you go, you'll call the police."

Well—I gave her five bob.

She looked at it; and then looked at me silently, with a flicker of contempt in those queer cheating light-grey eyes of hers. I shall never know if the contempt was because I had given her the five shillings, or had not given her the ten shillings.

Could there have been a sillier compromise? Not in all the world of silliness. For twice five shillings, I should at least have had this impenitent quiver of excitement on the horizon. For five shillings less, I should have had my self-respect intact, and the gratifying knowledge that I belonged to that vast alli-

ance of normal, excellent, consistent, well-balanced people who do not encourage nonsense.

As it was, what had I got?

Be patient, I am leading up to that elephant gradually.

It was just about a quarter of a century ago—so the pitiful little story begins, of a Woman too credulous and an Elephant too elusive. A group of us sat round a table in an orchard in Cornwall, with the tips of our credulous fingers upon an inverted tooth-glass, and the letters of the alphabet arranged in a circle around it. Prompted by unseen spirits, the tooth-glass rushed about and spelt out messages: some sinister, some encouraging, some distinctly coy, and some, I regret to say, lewd. When the latter happened, we lifted up the tooth-glass and shook it madly upon the empty air, hoping thus to drive away its temporary tenant, and replace it by a spirit of more delicate perceptions. All the others had had messages, but I had been persistently left out. Now at last the tooth-glass turned its attention to me and indicated that it had to give a warning of very special import. Breathlessly we spelt out the words: B-E-W-A-R-E-O-F-T-H-E-E-L-E-P-H-A-N-T.

That was all. Quite clearly and no misspelling: "Beware of the elephant!" And then it darted off at a tangent to inform my friend that she was to give herself body and soul to a Muscovite politician with a spade-shaped beard.

Well, but "Beware of the elephant." You would think, wouldn't you, that it might be a simple matter going through life bewaring of all elephants till one met *the* elephant? You would think that not more than once a year or so, the issue would be raised and the parlourmaid announce: "If you please, madam, there's an elephant downstairs wishes to see you. Should I show him up?" You would say "No," and that would be the end of that.

Yet actually, since that evening by moonlight in the orchard in Cornwall a quarter of a century ago, life has been a perfect saraband of potential elephants, and every one of them had to be avoided. I never, for instance, go to circuses. The matter became an obsession with me. Had the tooth-glass said B-E-W-A-R-E-O-F-T-H-E-W-H-I-T-E-M-O-U-S-E . . . But you see, there are so many quaint things that an ill-disposed elephant might do to you. Most of us have heard the legend of a Modern Androcles taking the thorn out of the elephant's foot, and twenty years later going to the Circus in the cheap seats, and grateful Jumbo lifting him out with his trunk and settling him down again in the twelve-and-six-pennies. "Elephants never forget," it murmured, and then hastily retired because it simply couldn't bear to be thanked; though I suspect that what Androcles was really trying to utter, in a breathless confused sort of way, was that his mother didn't allow him to accept expensive seats from strange elephants. . . .

There are crossroads in London called (after a public-house) "The Elephant and Castle." I managed to avoid them for a good number of years, until one day a friend, taking me to visit one of his friends (a very nice rag-and-bone merchant) remarked: "We'll get out of the taxi at the Elephant and Castle and walk from there, shall we? It's just across the road and then a little way down."

I didn't feel like explaining to him. I felt he might consider me a fool. So I acquiesced, thinking the while: "Have I met it at last? Is this it?" Many a man has walked less bravely up to the cannon's mouth than myself starting off through the crowded traffic at the Elephant and Castle; under my breath reminding the holders of my destiny, Old Tooth-Glass and the rest of them, that it was the *Castle* part of it I was crossing, not the Elephant part of it. Perhaps owing to this, I did

get safely to the other side; the doom did not that day fulfil itself. And I still went on bewaring of the elephant.

Only once did I forget. When I had a play coming on, a play very dear to my heart, I sent my leading lady, on the night before we opened, a small jade elephant as a mascot. She was enchanted with it. She wore it through the performance. The play was a flop on a truly awe-inspiring scale of floppery. I might have been surer, afterwards, that this was at last the elephant I had been told to beware of, and that the spell was therefore broken, had not the mirror hanging in her room fallen with a crash during the night before, shattered into a thousand fragments. "Yes, but it wasn't hanging on a wire, only on a bit of frayed string," she justified herself. "*I wish*, darling, you wouldn't send me elephants if they mean bad luck for you."

"I wish you wouldn't hang up your looking glasses on thin pieces of frayed embroidery silk," I replied coldly. Then we kissed and made it up.

But if it was the looking-glass that did it, then that elephant was still going about looking for me.

Directly New York knew I was there, for that same Christmas when Larry brought me the little Christmas angel at two o'clock in the morning, it put on a Christmas musical-play-and-circus-in-one called "Jumbo." Then the fun began. To be lifted out of the stalls and deposited (by a triumphantly tootling trunk) in the cheaper seats upstairs might have been good publicity, but not my favourite kind. Mentally thanking Old Tooth-Glass for the warning, twenty-five years ago, I declined all invitations; though tickets for "Jumbo" came pouring in, by hand and by mail. "Where shall we go tonight? *I* know! Let's go to 'Jumbo'!" I had only to meet a captivating stranger, for him to say to me: "Glad to meet you, you're wonderful, you're the top, may I escort you to

'Jumbo'?" Even if my friends took seats for another play, they changed them for "Jumbo" (apparently Jumbo was an elephant) and only told me of their decision at the last moment: "You don't mind, do you—as you haven't seen it yet? It's swell. Jumbo's a lamb!"

But I knew that Jumbo was not a lamb, but an elephant.

Then Roland Young rang me up and asked me what I was doing on Christmas night, and whether I would care to dine with them first and afterwards we would all go to—

"Jumbo," I said.

And: "No," I said.

But Roland has a persuasive way with him. Perhaps you have seen him in "The Man Who Could Work Miracles." He worked the miracle with me. He persuaded me to come along to "Jumbo" even after he had heard my true reasons for staying away. He said: "You've got an elephant fixation, and it won't do."

I suggested that it might not be so much that I had a fixation about an elephant, as that an elephant, perhaps Jumbo, perhaps not, might have a fixation about me.

Roland promised that he would hold my hand tightly all the time and hurl himself, if necessary, between me and Jumbo, in the same way that Ouida's Cigarette hurled herself between the bullets and Bertie Cecil, Viscount Royallieu, Main-de-Femme-mais-Main-de-Fer (for short) in the Foreign Legion.

But there was no need for such heroism. That Christmas night at the circus in New York was the end of my elephant fixation. Jumbo was charming. A mysterious affinity thrilled between us like a silver wire vibrating. Jumbo's smile said: "My dear, I wish I had a lovely thin skin like yours. What do you do for it? Come, come, what have you been afraid of all this time? Elephants aren't like that."

It was a good Christmas.

Roland Young, as I have already related, grudged me no horses for my desultory collection except his own bit of Ming, and that was perhaps a natural exception. On this especial night, to hearten me for my encounter with Jumbo, he had an assembly of horses round my plate as Christmas presents: a silver horse rearing arrogantly on its haunches; a pair of horses from Venice fantastically hitched to a gondola; a tiny ivory horse about the size of my Maundy Penny; a zebra, which had a perfect right to be in the collection, because zebras began as small white horses, and then grew spots as protective colouring in the jungle so that boa-constrictors should not notice them, and the spots dragged out into lines and into that beautiful waving pattern which so enchanted me that I used to visit the two zebras in Central Park nearly every day, appreciating the faint rose flush on the foreheads just where the two sides of the pattern parted in the middle. After I returned to England, I heard that one of the two had killed its mate. It seemed a pity; they were a gentle-loving pair; some other animal in Central Park must have been making mischief. Roland also gave me a Mexican mule of the sturdy sure-footed kind that climbs down the dizzy pathways of the Grand Canyon, looking as though it would precipitate you at any moment thousands of feet into the Colorado River winding below. This particular mule was also a money-box, and I wished I could make up my mind to stuff him full of half-crowns; but it needs will-power to use a money-box sternly and consistently. When I lived in Italy, I had a money-box and thrust into it every shining one-lira piece that drifted in; one might not cheat and ask for them; they had to occur of their own accord. When the money-box was full, I counted my lire and bought myself a Persian rug from a travelling Balkan, and threw in a dinner of *spaghetti al burro* as well as

the price. The Persian rug was Brummagem and faded in the wrong way almost at once. (And of this, more hereafter.)

I had book-ends which were large snorting vermilion horses who began their lives coal-black. This is their history and origin: It was my first day at the Hollywood Film Studio (discreetly I will not say which studio) and the headmaster—for so I always called Mr. Louis B. Mayer or Mr. Winfield Sheehan or Mr. David Selznick or Mr. Carl Laemmle or Mr. Jesse Lasky—had made an appointment to see me at ten A.M. Now what with one thing and what with another thing; and what with summertime and what with overhead expenses and the prices of bootleg Bourbon; and what with the Banks closing, and a star or two being temperamental that day; what with this and that and the hot weather and his wife having just had a fine baby, the studio headmaster had to keep on putting off his appointment with me all through the long slow day. I do not take kindly to waiting; I never did. It does not make me angry, it makes me cry; and towards six P.M. I was well on the road to a nervous breakdown. My quiet little private office was just above the studio dynamos, throbbing and pounding like souls in torment. A friend of mine who was working on the same unit chanced in, found me in this state, and on some pretext, I forget what, sent me out for an hour: it might even have been that by then the headmaster had summoned me for the conference.

Did you ever read, when you were a child, a lovely book called "Sara Crewe," by the author of "Little Lord Fauntleroy"? It was filmed with Shirley Temple as Sara not very long ago. Sara Crewe had been the parlour pupil at Miss Minchin's school. Her father in India suddenly stopped sending money because he was ruined and shot himself. Miss Minchin started being cruel to Sara, using her as a drudge, sending her out in all weathers, not replacing her clothes when they wore to rags,

letting her sleep in a cold bare draughty attic without any carpets, giving her only the scraps from the tables when she was hungry. And one day—this is the great thrill—one day when Sara, wet through, tired out, half starved and lonely, dragged herself up the long, long flights of stairs to her attic, she flung open the door—

—and the room had been transformed by unknown wizardry into bright warmth and cosiness: a fire, rugs, an arm-chair, cushions, a satin eiderdown, a fleecy dressing-gown and fur-lined slippers, books on the shelves and pictures on the walls, and an appetising little dinner waiting hot on the hob. This in one form or another will always be the best story in the world. Psychiatry calls it “wish-fulfilment.”

None of this is as irrelevant as it seems. That evening in Hollywood I was Sara Crewe. For when I returned to my bare horrid little office, my friend's whirlwind energy and supple imagination, her rich understanding of just how I had felt, had transposed the room during the space of an hour in very much the same way as Sara's, bar the hot dinner on the hob. She had arranged, instead, cool oranges and grapefruit and lemonade standing about in green glass bowls and pitchers. She had even cut out from current magazines pictures of my friends to pin on the walls. She had remembered a pack of scarlet-and-blue “Show Boat” playing-cards for playing patience, should I feel like patience. Cushions and rugs and flowers and writing-paper and a cool green pen and a lemon-squeezer . . . Oh, yes, and those two vermilion horses for book-ends: she had stopped the entire work of the painting department of the studio, busy as they were with some colossal super-production, so that they should colour black horses red, and so complete the picture of home for me.

I must give honourable mention to a horse in my collection

lovingly called "the village idiot," snow-white, with a modest simpering sheep-among-wolves expression.

The pick of my stable was a green heraldic horse from Sweden, given me by the daughter of a Lord Justice of England; but I always say, with her permission, that it was the Lord Justice himself who presented it to me, because that brings an imposing suggestion of wigs, robes and three-cornered hats. On either side of the Stockholm stallion stood two more stable choices: red horses beautifully moulded in wax with a queer old-fashioned Dürer look about their necks. They were presented to me on impulse by a generous host (yes, again) to take along with me as mascots when I started out on my first adventurous visit to Hollywood. But as they were treasures well-known to his friends, I have had to endure, ever since, people stopping dead in front of them and saying in a surprised voice: "Look here, did he *give* you those?" The perpetual stress on "give" was most wounding to my feelings. What did they think? Did they think I just pick up horses and put them in my handbag and walk away with them?

The horse I am now holding in my hand, twisting it about, stretching and pulling it to pieces, is a horse of rustic charm, made of rough wooden rings and beads, neutral-tinted, strung on elastic. A homely horse who has frequent and literal reason to whinny: "Don't bother me, don't *bother* me, I'm all unstrung today!" His name is scratched on his back: Brass Monkey. For he was given to Romney Brent for luck, on the first night in London of "Three Men on a Horse" which had a long run, with Romney playing lead. On the last night, he gave it to me—for luck. (And of this, too, much more hereafter.)

A whole family of white china horses, copies of horses of the Kian-Sin period; horses lying, sitting, standing, trotting, galloping, in every conceivable position; one of them, rolled

over on his back, kicking up his heels in sheer exuberance and *joie de vivre*, was saying, as it were: "Uncle John, what do you do when you feel *too* well in the morning?" They were handed to me in a basket, one for every day of the voyage, when I sailed for home after my second visit to New York, four years ago.

Nostalgia for New York: It was thrilling when I arrived on this second and last visit, to fall asleep knowing that I should wake in the morning and see again from my window that breath-taking landscape of tall towers so felicitously grouped against the sky; solid and yet remote; strange castles of fairy-tale illustrations come true at last.

Here is an essay that I wrote on my return in 1936, fortunately not yet aware that it would be nostalgia so long-drawn out that I still can give no date to end it:

On your return to London, for the first few days you wonder what is the matter with you. You think, "Am I sickening for something?" You think, "I'm out of touch, that's what it is." Finally, you surrender to the fact that you are feeling flat, that the earth is flat, that the air is flat, life is flat, and that you have the audacity to be homesick for an America which is not your home at all.

In America, you are an event; in America, you are spoilt; in America, your American friends and your English friends who live there permanently and have caught the atmosphere, welcome you as though they had been waiting with animation suspended, kept on a tight leash, until you arrived. And not only your friends, but strangers, interviewers, publishers, people you have met once only, at a party three years ago; people who have heard about you; people who love the English; people who love books; people who want to know what you

think the Prime Minister ought to do; people who want to know what you think anybody ought to do; people who want to know what you like, what you wear, what "G. B." stands for. They stress your personality; they plant charm in you by emphasising it long before it is there (by the subtle method of the Wizard of Oz); they *care*. They want to hear you lecture, they want to see you lecture; they want your voice on the wireless. You are not only an event, you are temporarily their darling, the most brilliant woman in the world. It is all the difference between an ardent lover and a kind but indifferent husband. Your happiness matters to them, and your preferences; and where you are going this evening, and where after that. You are the Wise Woman of the mediæval village, with a panacea for all ills; you have come from enchanted countries; you are a part of the old world; you're history, you're a thrill, you're the top.

And this pleasant excitement, this infectious friendliness, does not immediately die down, as with children whose curiosity has been satisfied. It goes on and on; it is bred of the tingle in the climate and the upward spring of the skyscrapers; it is the pace, the uninhibited life of America's uninhibited soul which rushes out to meet and join with the life which they presuppose is in your soul already. Amusing things on a smaller scale happen in showers: a general release and gay circulation of presents and flowers and books; the editor of a women's monthly magazine sends me a pair of black velvet and fur snow boots; a famous actress sends me a pair of bright blue gloves; my publishers send me a little matter of fifty or sixty books. Even Noel Coward, when I am in New York with him, becomes infected with the general idea that I am a real lady and sends me beauty roses. The Lunts renew their discovery that I have Egyptian wrists, and (again by the Wizard of Oz technique) my wrists immediately respond and

become too Egyptian for words. I am made a freemason of Science, Modernity and the twentieth century, by the excited discovery that I possess a "wonderful radio voice." That Greuze picture materialised as my manicurist, brings me a pot of her homemade grape jelly, and leads me to believe that I am her gleam of spiritual adventure. The chief bellboy at our hotel puts his arm protectingly round me and says: "Just you leave everything to me. You don't need to worry at all!" (And, most surprisingly, you can and you needn't.) The Dutch Treat Club invites me to a luncheon where I am the only woman among three hundred gentlemen; an exaggerated compensation for moments when one was a *débutante* and one's mother used to murmur about the difficulty of "getting enough men" for the dance. Special curves and angles of intimacy with life in America are presented for my pleasure and approval: I am escorted by my publisher to the top of the Empire State Building and shown the power and the glory; and forthwith to dine on top of Radio City—a mere step in space from one to the other, but more miles in vertical travel than I can accomplish in any other city in the world.

That young journalist from St. Paul whom I met casually and liked so much startles me by an intimate message printed at the foot of his formal column of book reviews; Rachel Field cooks me her succulent New England luncheons, and has to be firmly restrained from giving me everything she possesses. An unknown lady stops me on Fifth Avenue and exclaims: "I knew you by your hair, and I just love your books!" I am photographed with Marc Connelly and King Pharaoh (a pleasing trio) on the set in Hollywood where they are filming "The Green Pastures"; King Pharaoh in costume, looking twopence-coloured; Mr. Connelly and I looking (I fear) penny-plain. A solitary procession of dusky snow-sweepers filing with their brooms across the dazzling white

winter prairie of Central Park, stops and courteously alters its course in order to escort back to safer paths the English lady who has lost her way on these lonely Steppes, and (though helped by black velvet and fur snow boots and an inadequately slim ivory and silver cane) seems to be in some peril of losing her head as well. The only fiasco of my whole five months is when I commit a social blunder and accidentally eat up one of Edna Ferber's exquisitely frail lace and satin doilies under the hazy impression that it is part of the ice-cream-and-meringue. And the only friendliness which I would have had slightly restrained, was that tendency, all through a severe winter, for guests at a party to rush up to me, seize both my hands, and say with their warm loving breath mingling with mine: "I ought to be in bed with the gripe. My temperature's 104. But I got right up out of bed so's to meet you here tonight."

You add all these exhilarating tributes, this exhilarating appreciation, to the perpetual excitement of your night view from the twentieth floor: Fifth Avenue galloping like a greyhound north to the horizon; its long traffic chain of lights brilliantly flashing from rubies to emeralds and back again to rubies, while on either side of it the towers stand tall and strong and grave against the sky. You add it all to the pace and the snap and the tingle in the air, the warmth of welcome, the keen interest and true kindness—and the result is that, when you get home, you feel, as I said, flat.

I heard the word "progressive" more often in America than in England; but I believe that they must have some sort of illusion about progress which is, after all, no more than a journey round a circle; the odd difference between their point of view from ours is that the American workers (men and girls) take it as a matter of course that they should change

from one job to another as often as possible; even if the change should be hazardous, at least they prefer it to the slowness and safety of remaining where they are and hoping gradually to climb to the top of the same firm. In America, it is a recommendation when you say you have changed your job seventeen times in the last three years; but in England our more cautious community would shake its head and declare that a man was no good if he could not contrive to stick to the firm who employed him and serve it well and faithfully without looking to the right or the left. If he changed often, the argument would be that his employers were not satisfied with him and he knew it, or that he had a restless unsatisfactory streak in his nature. In England, the charge of disloyalty would cling to him like a burr; in England they would perpetually remind him that "a rolling stone gathers no moss." It is amusing that what is a label of reproach in one country should be a testimonial in the other. America is a land where you may seek the quality of resignation, but will not find it.

Before I made up my mind to lecture in America, which seemed to me an alien and terrifying prospect, I was asked to lecture in England, at Bristol. I had been asked before to lecture in my own country, but had nearly always refused. This time I thought I had better see what it was like, though I was prepared to be received more or less as a matter-of-course evil which would have to be endured as civilly as possible; for that, frankly, was my own opinion of lectures and lecturers. As it happened, I was received with banners and cymbals; a handsome young escort with his handsome young motor-car placed at my disposal; so were dusky red roses; and lunch with the famous firm Harvey Bros., where we drank the finest 1878 claret, 1848 cognac and 1880 Bristol cream; all things lovely. My author friends who were familiar with lecture conditions in America told me that this was the treatment nor-

mally to be expected over there, though rare in an England that had not the lecture virus.

So I decided, on these reassuring tidings, that I *would* give lectures in America; just a few, to see how I acquitted myself. I have already spoken of the dazzling experience of lunch at the Dutch Treat Club with about three hundred gentlemen present and myself the only lady. I was even more amazed to discover that most of my lectures took place at eleven o'clock in the morning, and that my audience consisted almost invariably of women. I had heard, of course, of the women's clubs of America, but I had not mentally visualised an actual spectacle of six hundred of them sitting trustfully in rows, mysteriously elated at the certain prospect of a lavish feast of spirit and intellect from one who was "in touch" with living art and literature at its source. An admirable desire, but difficult, too difficult to fulfil: the author truly "in touch" is mythical; does not exist. Yet the phrase was used again and again, in my brief conversation with individual members of my audiences when the actual lecture was over: "We do so love keeping in touch." "We may be out of the way here, but we keep in touch." It is rather disconcerting that they should feel that there is a magical benefit to be gained by actually seeing, knowing, "touching" an individual no different from themselves. They believe that anyone who has "kept in touch" and "made a name" deserves it for some clear and good reason: a reason that will shimmer like a halo round her head.

Names are, indeed, extremely important in America. As mysteriously important as in all folk-lore and legend. Not a single interviewer missed asking me what "G. B." stood for, and why I used only my initials and not my full name. Whatever else was left out of the interview in print, that bit always faithfully remained in. Before I even stepped on American land, a merry band of interviewers who had rushed aboard,

drummed their first rat-tat-tat on the name theme; the resemblance to the George Bernard Shaw monogram was, of course, a free gift, from a publicity point of view. A well-known journalist and a well-known author had had an excited bet, late one night, about "B" and what it stood for, and rumour says that swords clashed and blood was spilt. Most American men will tell you their mother's maiden name; and most American women their name before they married, as though it were a fact still tangibly influencing their lives. It was America which started the Lucy Stone Society. So it is not surprising that they should attribute a sinister reluctance to "come clean" in my austere use of G. B. Stern; whereas the truth was that I had originally been utterly casual about it; thinking that as good or as bad a way of putting a professional name to my first book as any other.

In England, people are interested in the creation but less in the creator. In America they are as passionately interested in the tree as in the blossom and fruit.

This is flattering, although one cannot but feel somewhat inadequate in this rôle of a magician, a pedlar of elixir or sovereign remedies. An elderly lady with a very sweet face and confiding manner asked me what she was to do about her grandchildren who were staying out too late at nights and would not tell her where they had been. This lady did not even stay to wonder whether I had grandchildren of my own. It was enough for her that I was an author with the glamour of Europe upon me, burning with wisdom, a potential answer to any and every problem. It did not occur to her to ask advice not of me but of a wise old friend who lived (perhaps) in the next block and had had endless and varied experience of difficult grandchildren. Yet I can imagine the brisk aside of her English prototype: "Ask *her* about my grandchildren? Bless you, why should I? She hasn't got any of her own. These

writers don't know anything about life, they get it all from books."

A well-known American author told me how he had lectured for three months, and, growing a little tired of the strain of beautiful behaviour and elevated morals, let his performance rip in the very last lecture of all, and flung forth whatever reckless wickedness and devastating cynicisms entered his head. When he had finished, he waited for the roof to fall and crush him. Then he became aware of a little silvery lady tiptoeing towards him from the audience, the first to reach him from the crowd. "Oh, Mr. X," she exclaimed, "how glad I am to find that we are both idealists!"

Once, in England, when I was lecturing on "Family Life down the Ages, in Fiction, Drama and Fact," a lady sitting in the front row, her corsage crusted with diamonds, and her snow-white hair piled Pelion upon Ossa, rose majestically in the hush after I had finished, and demanded: "*What about Boadicea?*" I was stunned. I could not see then, nor do I see now, where Boadicea hitched on, so to speak, to family life. Had she any family life? If so, it had been kept from me. The majestic lady waited with some impatience. Then: "Surely she ought to have been included?" I stammered: "Yes, yes, of course, I don't know how I could have left her out." "*Thank you,*" said the lady with snow-white hair piled high. And seated herself again.

(Might it have been Boadicea herself, reincarnated?)

While I was driving along a quiet country road in California in March, 1936, I passed a small forgotten Spanish Mission; not a show place, like the Santa Barbara Mission, but a long low building with an old red roof; lapped by that strange hush which always makes the song of birds sound louder and purer in a cloistered garden than in less holy places.

I stopped and went in. I was welcomed by a monk who had the rosy face and the serene friendliness that reminded me of an old song popular in my childhood, from the comic opera, "La Poupée":

*What care I?
Let the world go by.
With a conscience clear
What need I fear . . .
For a jovial monk am I.*

He said he was born in Saxony, and had worked for twenty years happily and successfully among the Apache Indians. Apparently he was deeply fond of his friends, the Indians. When he said, "We built this wall ourselves, and besides we love to work in the garden," I asked how many of the brotherhood there were in the Mission, thinking there could not be more than about thirty or forty in this tranquillity of sun and shade, quiet and kindness and industry. He said, "We are two," without any inflection to betoken that two was not a throng. I did not see the other monk, who was an Irishman. A German and an Irishman working for the Indians in a Spanish Mission in Western America. And though this may appeal to the romantic side of the passer-by, it is not in itself romance, but substantial fact.

Some miles farther along, we joined the main road; peace fled and was lost in a procession of tearing, blaring automobiles, a multiplicity of tin sheds and garages and embarrassingly personal advertisements. A sight which occurred over and over again along this road was a field piled up with a litter of broken rusty motor-cars and a sign which announced: "Auto Wreckers." "Auto-wreckers" sounded to me a lawless trade; I wondered that they should flare forth their destruc-

tive intentions so boldly. Idly I began to plan a story in the Stevensonian manner, which should be called "The Auto-Wrecker's Bride." My chauffeur told me, however, that it was a recognised trade and as good a way to wealth as any other: The auto-wrecker bought up for a song (perhaps my story might be a musical comedy) cars that were, metaphorically speaking, on their last legs; and retaining such parts as could be mended and sold at a profit, callously flung away the rest into a field to rot and rust and point a moral to reflective authors.

It would be absurd to emphasise any obvious contrast between the Mission garden and the auto-wreckers' garden; equally absurd to say that one stood for romance and the other, realism; that one was out of date and the other, modern; that one was useless and charming, and the other, necessary and progressive. Since they both existed and both functioned usefully, they both stood for reality. And, not to stress time too much, the aims of one and the aims of the other will equally echo down to future generations as part of the same delicious but absurd fairy-tale called "the Past."

It is perfectly possible to be homesick for Pleshey while you are in New York or California, and for New York and California while you are in Pleshey.

I asked Paul to stop. We were just outside Pleshey and I saw a house that I wanted. Paul obligingly drew up, but cancelled my gratitude by the remark: "It's beyond your means." I think indignation was justifiable. "It's *not* beyond my means because I haven't any. So I can never go beyond my means. And that house just suits me." He agreed that it was a good house, sober and not gaudy; old brownish brick; the architecture in the style of a Jane Austen house with a drive up to the white pillared porch and entrance, and bow windows

round at the side, bow windows harmonious and inevitable. " 'I believe there are few country parsonages in England half so good,' said General Tilney, in 'Northanger Abbey.' 'It may admit of improvement, however. Far be it from me to say otherwise; and anything in reason—a bow thrown out, perhaps; though, between ourselves, if there is one thing more than another my aversion, it is a patched-on bow.' " A smaller building at the side of the garden, the "littlest house" which the bigger house had spawned in accordance with all my earlier psychological observations, was shaded by a richly coloured copper-beech; I think here must have been the stables where Mr. Bennet kept the horse which his wife would not allow Jane to ride when she went to visit the eligible Mr. Bingley; rain threatened, Mrs. Bennet hoped her beautiful daughter would catch cold and have to stay the night. I cannot refrain from all these Austen ruminations, for the house was of just the right size, sobriety and gentlemanliness to have belonged to the Bennets or to the Morlands. It was not a noble enough mansion for Sir Thomas Bertram, or Darcy, or the Elliots; but on the other hand, too big for the Dashwoods after their change of fortune; for it was clearly stated that when Willoughby offered to give Marianne a horse, Elinor sensibly and priggishly pointed out that that would involve their mother in much extra expense and trouble, as there were no stables attached to the cottage, and moreover an extra manservant would have to be hired to jog along behind Marianne on her rides.

Paul drove slowly by. "I shall buy it," I said firmly. And he repeated: "It's beyond your means." "There's no tax on dreams," I said with a winsome pixy look, sidelong. Paul was sick. "No, but seriously," I went on, "if I wrote a book called 'No Tax on Dreams,' a ghastly wish-fulfilment book, I should earn enough to buy that house; and I'd call it 'Taxes,'

with an *e*, not an *i*. It's a good name," I continued to argue earnestly, "plain and down to earth. You needn't look so disgusted, as though I'd said 'The Wee Nest,' or 'Home o' Pan.' E. V. Lucas once wrote an essay on that subject, saying the best sort of name for a house in the country was whatever the natives called it from old habit: 'Over yon two fields an' across stile, yu'll see Buckler's right ahead.' 'Buckler's' apparently wasn't the actual name of the farm; but three generations ago it belonged to a man called Buckler, and they ignored the more recent tenants. So I shall call mine 'Taxes.' "

Paul seemed to have lost the thread of my consecutive logic: "Why?" Puzzled. "Was that your grandmother's maiden name?" Fortunately my grandmother had a rather romantic maiden name; a Spanish name: d'Almeda. An eighteenth century ancestor in our family was a poet called d'Almeda; and—one of these freakish links which might happen in any conversation about a house called "Taxes"—the house in Holland Park where I was born and had lived for the first fourteen years of my life had been named "d'Almeda." "Which just shows," I said to Paul, on the finality note. "Yes, doesn't it?" he agreed amiably.

It was nice, rambling round the lanes and country roads of Essex; for Paul understands that one can ramble almost as well in a car as on foot. ("Twice as well," he agreed again, "in your case.") Now it had stopped raining, and everything smelt so fresh and gay, inspiring me to further idle chatter on this and on that: "And there's a house in Brambleford called 'Mere's Parcel,' and that's a good name too. A 'parcel' is an old land measure, and this particular 'parcel of land' had once belonged to a man called Mere. Mere's Parcel. Buckler's. Taxes. But the only house I've ever seen which should have been called 'The Cedars' was called 'Kenilworth'; it had eleven glorious cedars planted over the grounds, with plenty

of space between. I should have called it 'Eleven Cedars.' " Paul suggested that should a thunderstorm destroy one of them I would then have to have my letter-paper re-stamped "Ten Cedars"; and anyhow "Eleven Cedars" as the name of a house was a trifle on the whimsical side. "Not if there *are* eleven cedars; it becomes dry fact. It might be whimsical if there were eleven poplars. 'The cedar spreads its dark green layers of shade.'" "Who said so?" "Tennyson." Paul was silent.

People are almost always silent when one quotes good Tennyson. They prefer it to be awful; and then they can shout "My God!" And yet, among other things, Tennyson wrote a poem called "Ulysses":

*... always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honor'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.*

"All experience is an arch." And, on our same way back through Pleshey, Paul called my attention to the Mound, at the end of the garden next door to Taxes: an upheaval of grass into a rough triangular shape which instantly called up associations with Picts and Scots and Romans; with any sort of camp or wall built against invasion since Britain first was Britain; with the barrow to the memory of St. Birinus, solitary on the Berkshire Downs; not far from the hill which

they say was a Danish camp when Alfred was fighting. With Offa's Dyke along the Welsh Border; with Hadrian's Wall and the Icknield Way.

Do people, not necessarily children, but people, still read Kipling's "A Centurion of the Thirtieth" and "On the Great Wall"? We stood on the remains of a fort of the Great Wall, on one of our drives with Paul across the moors in the North of England and over Carter Bar into Scotland. And while we stood there and wished we knew more about it, a small jolly man with short legs, in a bright check suiting, came running up to us from nowhere. He was bursting with instruction and scholarship. The Roman Wall was his darling, his hobby, his meat, drink and butter. But so perverse is human nature that directly the extent of his knowledge dawned on us, we made some excuse and hastily scrambled away, down the slope, back to the car, and drove off into the blue.

When we had driven far enough we slowed down and began regretting our impulse: Never again would such an encounter be offered to us at exactly the right moment; offered, lost and thrown away; for, damn it, we *wanted* to know about the Roman Wall! I said: "That little man must have been called Theodore." "Why?" asked Paul. "It means gift of God," I answered grumpily.

Paul told me that the Mound at Pleshey was all that was left of the castle of the Earls of Essex. In shape it reminded me of the Minneys, a three-cornered hillock beside a cove in North Cornwall. The Minneys meant the Dead Kings' Burial Ground, and the wild flowers which grew on the Minneys were gayer and smelt more fragrant than any other wild flowers, though perhaps it was just that they mingled with

the smell of the Atlantic beating in on the rocks. You could lie on the Minneys and watch the curling waves, sharp light glass-green and dark velvety bottle-green, curling and tossing into the cove. And if you closed your eyes, you could remember nothing but pink sea-thrift, for the whole air was drenched with it. You lay drowsily on tufts and cushions of sea-thrift, and thought a little, but not too much, of Good King Constantine, or Bad King Constantine. Or was it just King Constantine with a rude adjective attached like the Bald, the Lopsided, the Squint-Eyed? Against the Minneys, its only drawback was that it chose to be tethered to the mainland by a narrow ledge of rock with a drop on either side to the savage rocks far below; four good strides would take you across, but it needed resolution to take those four good strides; and it faintly spoilt the hours lying there, when you knew that the resolution had to be taken again when you wanted to go back to lunch; and even if you took your lunch with you, that did not cancel the question of tea and dinner.

Is it merely chance, I wondered, or sentiment, which has led to such widespread legend that flowers grow more beautifully where some buried Cæsar bled, or where King Constantine lies in his ceremonial grave above the sea? The plant of basil with which Keats' Isabella camouflaged her lover's head flourished nicely, so we are led to believe, watered by her tears. (It is not on record whether the cook ever came in and said: "I wonder, miss, if you could spare me a bit of that there basil to put in the omelette stuffing?" But I suppose Isabella's reply would have been either wan or snappish; in fact, I would put my money on wan.) The wild hyacinth starts a memory of two Greek boys throwing the discus, and of the one who killed his friend, and of the flower which welled up into life where the boy fell, bright blood-red lines veining each blossom. I used to pick armfuls, under the olives,

while I lived in Italy. And travelling from Greece and Italy to England—for Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night* happened so surely in England that it is easy to accept with an incredulous smile his little fiction about Athenian workmen and the marriage of Theseus and Hippolytus—we can hear Oberon say:

*Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell:
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it love-in-idleness.*

Perhaps if we set aside the strangeness of legend and poetry, and leave ourselves with the gardening-books which state plainly that blood-manure is beneficial for flowers and trees, it will explain the rich wealth of flowers that blow in the salt wind on the Minneys; it will explain never-blows-the-rose-so-red, and the pot of basil, the hyacinth, and love-in-idleness. It will explain also that wild flower called "Dane's-blood" which is supposed to flourish only on those parts of England near the East coast where once England fought battles against the Danish invasion. It was Gladys Calthrop who first told me about Dane's-blood, and sent me a couple of specimens and the sort of horticultural description which always leaves me highly respectful:

DANE'S-BLOOD: A small purple flower, like an anemone. A long-shaped cup of six petals, covered with silvery down outside, deep purple inside. Pale yellow stamens clustered inside the cup. A slender downy stalk, and a green bract below the cup. The whole thing is very soft to touch. They grow close to the ground in thick masses, when they grow at all, and prefer chalky soil.

I planned a story which was to be called "Dane's Blood." Here is the rough précis:

A Dane leading a very vivid personal life, full of amorous intrigues, offering every motive for murder. Then one day he is found murdered, in the village of Brambleford on the Berkshire Downs, bleeding from a deep wound in the chest. The body has apparently been thrown into a garden after the crime, and the garden belongs to a gentle old man, slightly eccentric, who loves children and flowers. There is such an overwhelming amount of motive to which the murder might be traced, that it is difficult to clear the matter up, and the guilty person is not tracked for a long time.

Some months later, wonderful irises begin to bloom in the old man's garden, a very rare and beautiful kind, of which he is very proud. The "detective" of the story sees them (let him tell it in the first person—easier) and quite casually learns from a native that they are named "Dane's Blood," because they will not grow except on soil where a Dane has bled. In a flash the real motive for the crime is clear, and the old man is apprehended. He is not very repentant: to him the flowers were important, and the Dane, except for his blood, was not. He merely intended that the Dane should cut his wrist with a knife, and sprinkle the sacrificial blood over the iris beds, but somehow the Dane could not understand this idea, and the old man became enraged at his stupidity. The knife was handy; he stabbed him in the chest, and left him bleeding in the garden all night.

The old man goes to the gallows, still convinced that the death of the Dane was less important than the blooming of his irises: "You see, they simply won't *grow* anywhere except where a Dane has bled." . . .

On the road to Brambleford, you pass an orchard of especially fine cherry trees. A nice gruesome little tale exists to account for their gleaming abundance of blossom and fruit:

at one time the house had been an inn; wealthy travellers who stopped there for only a night, never left again; in the garden, a new cherry tree was planted to explain the freshly turned earth; and so the landlord became a rich man. Though all this happened a very long time ago, the evil influence was so strong that the tenants before the present ones were forced to have the spot exorcised. Since when, it has been just a remarkably fine orchard.

For the first time in my life, last June, I was turned loose in a cherry orchard, also near Brambleford; not one of those miniature affairs at the end of somebody's garden, but a professional orchard which stretched for acres in all directions, but belonged to kindly and benevolent owners who allowed us to ramble and eat all we could, and, God help us, many many more than we could. Deeply was I in sympathy with Lyubov in Chekhov's "Cherry Orchard," who complained, when it was cut down, that though all the others felt bad about it, she, like Mrs. Gummidge over the burnt porridge, felt it most of all. I mean, going out and buying a pound of cherries wouldn't be at all the same thing. I do understand, Lyubov, honestly I do; I didn't before—I was British and unsensitive; but since I went through that orchard, ripe and gleaming with Ambers and White Hearts, Early Rivers, Napoleons and Dukes, I can understand both Chekhov and the unknown who wrote "Life's a bowl of cherries."

Yet, transcending Chekhov, and transcending my delectable experience in the orchard at Brambleford, the thought and sight of cherry trees, a spring miracle of brilliant white, must remain dedicated in sorrow to the memory of A. E. Housman:

*Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough.*

In August, 1940, I was convalescent in a little house in St. John's Wood after an operation; so it was during the first big air-raids over London that I read a biography of A. E. Housman written by a great friend of his, who for many years in Cambridge used to accompany him on his walks. To my astonishment I learnt that Housman took his walks mainly for the sake of exercise, and kept his head bent and his eyes on the ground all the time. Either by this time he must deliberately have decided to put up a defiant barrage against any visible response to what still meant too much for his heart's comfort; or else the adoration of nature, now passionate, now careless, which brimmed over from every page of "A Shropshire Lad," written when he was twenty, was a phase of his youth. Yet it is too strange for belief, even in a world of strangeness, that the man who at twenty-one had written that "to look at things in bloom, fifty springs are little room," should at sixty-one not raise his eyes from the path on which he walked for the sake of exercise.

Or perhaps he still preferred, even forty years after, to walk with an imaginary "merry guide":

*Once in the wind of morning
I ranged the thymy wold;
The world-wide air was azure
And all the brooks ran gold.*

*There through the dews beside me
Behold a youth that trod,
With feathered cap on forehead,
And poised a golden rod.**

Curious, how young poets repeat this boyish longing for a silent all-satisfying companion, to multiply magic into a fuller magic. W. J. Turner felt it too:

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*I walked home with a gold-dark boy
 And never a word I'd say,
 Chimborazo, Cotopaxi
 Had taken my speech away.*

Gold, always gold, and never the hard spinning gold of coin, but a running gold of brooks and early morning, with gold on the mountain peaks of Ecuador, the smell of golden gorse on the English wold. Life before pain began; the apotheosis of joy, light-hearted and carefree; the penalty, later on, might well be a deeper nostalgia for such a world back again.

Gold, and running water:

*And I know
 How the May fields all golden show,
 And when the day is young and sweet,
 Gild gloriously the bare feet
 That run to battle . . .*

There were young poets, Housman, Turner, Rupert Brooke, Sassoon, for whom happiness, clear and joyous, always came with a shout: "Everyone suddenly burst out singing," "The naked earth is warm with spring," and a plunge "like swimmers into cleanness leaping," which was for Rupert Brooke a symbol of both war and heaven. "A pure river of water of life, clear as crystal," as a literal promise, can rouse longings more nostalgic than for all the rest of the jeweller's catalogue, hard and gleaming in Revelations.

My own passionate love of being in water, on water, beside water, hearing water when I fall asleep and wake up from sleep, eating or drinking with a carefree companion on a slope of grass or terrace or balcony jutting over water, leads me to remember poems that express the same exultation. Did

Pippa swim or even paddle in the water during her day's perfect holiday, or was it enough for her to see the sunbeams dancing on her wash-basin through most of the first scene of Browning's play? Regrettably unlike Pippa in many things, I must confess to the same idiot sensation that all's right with the world when I turn on the cold tap and the sun flashes on the miniature cascade. For some reason beyond rational argument I cannot get the same all's-right feeling when the rays dance on water from the *hot* tap. It must be that I am exquisitely susceptible to suggestion. . . .

My bedroom in that little house in St. John's Wood was a beautifully balanced room of green and white hangings, white walls and green-tiled fireplace; a green and white glass chandelier and looking-glass tables and many looking-glasses. Just beyond the window stretched a bough of the plane tree in the garden, with green leaves, only a few as yet turned gold. When the sun was out, it shone through the leaves of the tree outside, and rippled lightly over the white walls and the chintzes and the looking-glass. I felt happy and rested and at ease, as though water were not far away. The air-raids suddenly got worse, and my bed was brought downstairs into the sitting-room. I was more rebellious than I need have been over such a small discomfort, considering what was going on all over England and all over Europe; except that I felt that I myself, with the disruptive needs of my convalescence, was not unlike the air-raids, for I had wrecked harmony; I had dragged half a room into another room; I had done on a petty scale what the bombs and guns were doing: jarring and crashing and making chaos. Even for an hour, now, one could not have it, this carefree delight of "all the brooks ran gold." But that was only because a job had to be done. Every day in the papers or by what we saw ourselves, we were given different affirmations of beauty, less youthful, perhaps, less

crystalline, but more exciting. And Housman's fear that fifty years would not be enough to look on cherry trees in bloom was not quite so true as de la Mare's "Look your last on all things lovely every hour." For the latter on first hearing may sound like the counsel of a pessimist until you realise that look your last means exactly the same as look your first, and only means look with all the appreciation you possess and all the gratitude, as though you were never to see it again, as though you had seen it seventy times and eighty times and a thousand times, as though you had never seen it before. Housman limits us strictly to the threescore years and ten, and subtracts a spring ruthlessly every year. It is a despairing thing. But de la Mare's look your last is look your first. It shows the *way* one should look, whether for the first time or for illimitable springs before or after death; whether we should die now, or next year, or in fifty years. Housman is the sadder of the two; it is not a philosophy, it is the wrong outlook, and a nostalgic outlook even at its most carefree. It is fear beginning already. There is no fear in "Look your last on all things lovely," as in taking off one year every year from fifty, saying "only forty-nine more springs," "only twenty-three more," "only seventeen more" . . . The same panic is sounded as in that terrible game of musical chairs which we played when I was children: every time the music stops, one chair fewer.

While we were driving through Pleshey, and I was reminded of cherry trees by Dane's-blood and by Buried Cæsars and the Mound and the Minneys, I was forty-eight; and I could not help mentally indulging in a sentimental reverie (I am contrite now) as to how I should feel on my fiftieth birthday in two years' time with a meticulously reckoned twenty more years left to see the cherry hung with snow.

Actually, on my birthday, France laid down arms; and I did not think about cherry trees.

Or did I? The presents on my tray that morning had included a basket of cherries, glowing and juicy; and also a bottle of Châteauneuf du Pape, one of my favourite wines of France; and the threepenny bit for luck, Kruger's head on it, which I have already described; and a brooch with a single diamond flashing up a reminder that I had been born into a family of diamond merchants. The year which brought me up to my fiftieth birthday, spring had seemed lovelier than ever before; but that may happen every year until sixty as well, and until seventy. Perhaps imagination deepens the lilac, gilds the laburnum, burnishes the pink and red cones among the dark leaves of the chestnut tree. Perhaps while we live, in defiance of June 17, 1940, there will always be moments at the zenith of spring and autumn when we can say with Edna St. Vincent Millay:

*Long have I known a glory in it all,
But never knew I this;
Here such a passion is
As stretcheth me apart,—Lord, I do fear
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year,
My soul is all but out of me,—let fall
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.*

Opposite my future dwelling (perhaps) in Pleshey was a cheerful childish view of fields, and a gaggle of spirited geese, and a duck-pond, and a small red and white house, bright and simple as the small red and white houses we used to colour when we were eight; and another rustic signboard marked: "Bridlepath to Whitehall," so that in case I should need Whitehall in a hurry, when I was living at "Taxes," I could saddle me my horse and gallop all the way . . . "I should like to see you saddling you your horse," remarked Paul with enough

relish not to sound offensive. Altogether, the view from "Taxes," if it ever became mine, undoubtedly had the quality and colour of a Randolph Caldecott picture-book. I hope this is not a too quaint comparison; for I have to be more careful about this tendency than if I were a roughhewn writer with craggy edges. After reading my second book, E. V. Lucas, who was then Managing Director of Methuen's, wrote to me as follows in a letter dated November 1st (I imagine it must have been in 1915):

You are, with all your affection for fantasy, a realist at heart. It is indeed only when you perversely allow unreality to carry you aside that you lose the road. . . . Why do you these things? Either write fairy tales or true tales; don't mix them. Don't change your mind half way through; don't be bizarre. You remind me rather of the old saying about [his beautiful handwriting!]
—about artists that they know how to paint but not what to paint . . . you must now get to work and write a novel of real people. No need to be any less amusing but more concentrated.

Unfortunately for me, many people then admired quaint and whimsical writing, so that, even after E. V. Lucas had given it the kick in the pants it deserved, it still received too much encouragement. During the last fifteen years or so, a type of gangster-hobo writing has appeared and flourished, which is like whimsy deliberately turned inside out; reacting so violently from its pet aversion that, following the route of a fried whiting, it has almost bitten its own tail. Several of these books have attacked and bitten me (I swear the process is thus more correctly described than by a sedate "I have read"). Their improbable "reality" seemed truly quaint and fairy-tale; with the only just off-gold conclusion, "And they lived unhappy ever after."

Nevertheless, when Paul pointed out to me that the front gate leading up the avenue of my Jane Austen house was

signed "Charles Collins," I had to remember Mr. Lucas' admonition, "Either write fairy tales or true tales; don't mix them," to prevent myself from telling you that it was signed William Collins. (It was a surprise, certainly, to find any signature at all on a gate.) You can understand how wistfully I longed to suppress the Charles and leave the Collins, having already settled, before seeing it, that this must be the house, if not the neighbourhood, where Mr. and Mrs. Bennet had dwelt with their daughters Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty and Lydia, and where their clergyman cousin had come to stay and help himself to a suitable wife, by kind permission of Lady Catherine de Bourgh.

Mr. William Collins, you will remember, wrote to Mr. Bennet as follows on the subject of his nephew's marriage to Elizabeth: "'After mentioning the likelihood of this marriage to her ladyship last night, she immediately, with her usual condescension, expressed what she felt on the occasion: when it became apparent that on the score of some family objections on the part of my cousin she would never give her consent to what she termed so disgraceful a match. I thought it my duty to give the speediest intelligence of this to my cousin, that she and her noble admirer may be aware of what they are about, and not run hastily into a marriage which has not been properly sanctioned.'" "The rest of his letter," said Mr. Bennet, "is only about his dear Charlotte's situation, and his expectation of a young olive-branch."

This is one of the rare cases in Jane Austen where mention is made of anyone having a baby; and even here, Mr. Collins' wife, Charlotte, was only a secondary character. It occurred also in "Sense and Sensibility": Charlotte again, and a secondary character again, not the heroine.

"Within a few days after this meeting, the newspapers announced to the world, that the lady of Thomas Palmer,

Esq., was safely delivered of a son and heir; a very interesting and satisfactory paragraph, at least to all those intimate connections who knew it before.

"This event, highly important to Mrs. Jennings's happiness, produced a temporary alteration in the disposal of her time, and influenced in a like degree the engagements of her young friends; for as she wished to be as much as possible with Charlotte, she went thither every morning as soon as she was dressed, and did not return till late in the evening."

Most spinsters, unless they be acid, prim and envious, which certainly Jane was not, are supposed to adore children; yet we can hunt in vain through the pages of Jane Austen for those Dream Children whom by all laws of tradition her hungry arms should yearn to embrace. It was Sheila Kaye-Smith who first drew my attention to the interesting fact that Miss Austen barely mentions children, and that when she does they are crisply treated and ruthlessly banished from the scene at the first possible moment. Jane would seem to be saying to those of her friends and relations who spoilt their infants, and, despite noise and importunity, paraded them too often among the grown-ups: "*This* is how they should be treated."

A certain tolerance is meted out to Emma's nephews and baby niece: "My nephews and nieces, I shall often have a niece with me." All the same, the cherished little Knightleys are not allowed to hang about the hall and be a nuisance to grandfather even after a long journey, but are whisked away quickly to the nurseries and given food to stifle their clamour. Mrs. Clay, in "*Persuasion*," enquires after Mary Musgrove's "two fine little boys"; but the only time we see these fine little boys is when one, obstinate, heavy and spoilt, clings to his Aunt Anne's neck and back and prevents her ministering to the other child ill on the sofa.

The Gardiner children are probably quite nice, though of

little importance. Lady Middleton's children, on the other hand, are terrible, and Jane herself seems to be speaking with more real exasperation and less of her usual sedate detachment when she describes their unruly behaviour:

"Lady Middleton . . . saw with maternal complacency all the impertinent incroachments and mischievous tricks to which her cousins submitted. She saw their sashes untied, their hair pulled about their ears, their work-bags searched, and their knives and scissors stolen away, and felt no doubt of its being a reciprocal enjoyment."

One of the best comedy scenes in "Sense and Sensibility" is where the two fond grandmothers compare inaccurately the respective heights of the Dashwood boy and the Middleton boy; yet this has not been written to commend the little ones to our fancy, but merely to give Jane a chance for exquisitely caustic comment on the clouded reason of relatives and the partiality of sycophants.

Catherine Morland's younger brothers and sisters will grow up tolerable because they have sensible parents; and Mrs. Thorpe's, intolerable, for the opposite reason. Lady Russell, when she visits the Musgroves, finds the room in an uproar beside which the zoo would seem Trappist territory:

"On one side was a table occupied by some chattering girls, cutting up silk and gold paper; and on the other were tressels and trays, bending under the weight of brawn and cold pies, where riotous boys were holding high revel. . . . Mr. Musgrove made a point of paying his respects to Lady Russell, and sat down close to her for ten minutes, talking with a very raised voice, but from the clamour of the children on his knees, generally in vain . . . 'I hope I shall remember in future,' said Lady Russell, as soon as they were reseated in the carriage, 'not to call at Uppercross in the Christmas holidays.'"

But the most devastating child-picture, furthest removed

from those cloying scenes of little fair-haired angels which the Victorians were presently to engender, was Jane Austen's description of the Price household at Portsmouth when Fanny eventually came back to stay:

"Mrs. Price, Rebecca and Betsey, all went up to defend themselves, all talking together . . . William trying in vain to send Betsey down again, or keep her from being troublesome where she was; the whole of which . . . could be plainly distinguished in the parlour, except when drowned at intervals by the superior noise of Sam, Tom and Charles chasing each other up and down stairs, and tumbling about and hallooing."

Fanny was stunned by the reverberations and the hullabaloo, and deeply shocked in her sensitive soul that her mother should make no attempt to correct her troublesome brood:

"She thought it would not have been so at Mansfield. No, in her uncle's house there would have been a consideration of times and seasons, a regulation of subject, a propriety, an attention towards everybody which there was not here."

Even if we turn to the last pages and happy endings of Jane Austen's six novels, they will testify again that Miss Austen took an unfavourable view of the child-world; or at least, did not deem it necessary for joyful wish-fulfilment. For though all her heroines marry, and all marry men whom they love, and the author always runs a little beyond the marriage finale in order to prophesy for our satisfaction a happy future for Jane and Elizabeth, Fanny and Emma, Anne and Catherine, Elinor and Marianne, in not one single instance (the omission is fantastic) does she include children among their blessings-to-be. Nor is Jane being squeamish or what Mr. Bennet would call "Missish" in this. Obviously the promise of what Mr. Bennet (again) called olive-branches, has simply not occurred to her. Jane who marries Bingley and

Elizabeth who marries Darcy continually have Kitty Bennet and Georgiana Darcy staying with them. Anne Elliot, when she is Mrs. Frederick Wentworth, finds herself "the mistress of a very pretty landaulette"—a comical substitute for sons and daughters. Of Fanny and Edmund:

"... to complete the picture of good, the acquisition of Mansfield living occurred just after they had been married long enough to begin to want an increase of income."

The only allusion to a possible small heir can be found in "Emma"; and then it is not direct prophecy, but a mischievous recognition on Emma's part, when she first becomes engaged to Knightley, that now she does not care any more that little Henry, her nephew and his, might not inherit Donwell Park, after all.

When we re-create the family life of the period from Jane Austen's novels, it would appear that the domineering reign of that Victorian tyrant, Papa, that Mr. Barrett of Wimpole Street, had not yet begun, and that children and young people under the Georges were far from being crushed and terrorised. On the contrary, most of the parents who appear in the six novels (can one ever say six without a pang of resentment that it could not have been sixteen or sixty-six?) are foolish and amiable in character and confused in their conversation. Lady Bertram, for instance, in "Mansfield Park," was deliciously brainless; she left all management of her children and her household to Sir Thomas; even when they give a ball it is Sir Thomas who draws up a list of the guests; even when a question arises as to whether her niece Fanny Price should accept a dinner invitation to the vicarage or not, Lady Bertram says helplessly:

"I will ask Sir Thomas, as soon as he comes in, whether I can do without her."

An even simpler ass is Mr. Woodhouse, Emma's father,

and in my opinion the most delightful comedy character Jane Austen ever presented as a free gift to the nation. Mr. Woodhouse toddled and doddled, had wumbled fears and idiotic fancies, clung to Emma, adored her, deprived his guests of asparagus and sweetbread fricassee in case it should not be wholesome, and offered them gruel all round or a lightly boiled egg instead.

Mrs. Dashwood, the mother of Elinor and Marianne and Margaret in "Sense and Sensibility," is in the same beloved tradition; although, as her name might lightly indicate, she has far more dash and confidence than either Lady Bertram or Mr. Woodhouse; she is, indeed, the world's optimist, and we could desire that Elinor might not so ruthlessly raze to the ground those sunny extravagant castles that Mrs. Dashwood has built in the air.

Yet, however foolish the parents, Jane Austen always insisted that their sons and daughters should pay them the scrupulous respect which was their due. Edmund, Emma and Elinor may see through the lazy fatuity of Lady Bertram, the tiresome hypochondria of Mr. Woodhouse, the unbalanced indulgence of Mrs. Dashwood; they may strive gently with a touch of priggishness to guide misguidance; but they will never never fail in veneration.

This is easier where the parent is a beloved parent, as were the three mentioned; but Anne Elliot, the heroine of "Persuasion," saw too clearly that Sir Walter was a pretentious snob, and even her tender heart could not excuse him. Elinor and Henry Tilney must have come very near to hating the General when his greed and bad manners involved them in his own shameful lack of good behaviour; both Elizabeth and Jane Bennet could not have had a shred of illusion left over the vulgar capricious Mrs. Bennet who would have sold either of them to a rich husband without any care for their happi-

ness. Yet we find Jane saying, directly after Bingley's proposal:

"I must go instantly to my mother. I would not on any account trifle with her affectionate solicitude."

And Edmund and Fanny do not fail to criticise Miss Crawford for criticising her uncle in a manner that upsets their sense of what should be owing to an elderly relation:

"... But was there nothing in her conversation that struck you, Fanny, as not quite right?"

"Oh yes! She ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did. I was quite astonished. I could not have believed it!"

"I thought you would be struck. It was very wrong; very indecorous."

The surprising thing is, not that they are sublimely unaware how we would gladly smack them hard for their censorious attitude, but that Jane Austen should be so entirely on their side, not on ours. Notwithstanding her gift, surpassing that of all other novelists, of perfect ironic vision slanted on to absurdity, it steadily refuses to function against the established order of filial duty.

From a more formal aspect, and therefore more surprising, Lady Russell quite seriously holds forth in "Persuasion" to Anne and Mary on the failure of Mr. Elliot to conform to the current conventional ideas, "His declining to be on cordial terms with the head of his family has left a very strong impression in his disfavour with me"; and on the necessity for not neglecting the titled cousins, Lady Dalrymple and her daughter, "Family connexions were always worth preserving ... if it could be done, without any compromise of propriety on the side of the Elliots."

Even Mrs. Dashwood thought it "right" that her daughters should see their half-brother sometimes, in spite of his indifference and neglect. Even lively, cheeky Elizabeth Bennet,

after she is married to Darcy, somewhat primly explains to Georgiana that "a woman may take liberties with her husband which a brother will not always allow in a sister more than ten years younger than himself."

Elinor Dashwood is the most persistently censorious in our collection of Austen heroines who are less irresponsible than their parents; Mrs. Dashwood must many times have grown a little weary of being harangued for extravagance and imprudence; and though she would surely have said, like mothers of every period, that she loved all her daughters alike, we can easily perceive by how many leagues and furlongs Marianne was her favourite; and, indeed, ours, except perhaps for her bad manners, which should undoubtedly have been attended to by her mother with some severity. We are all ready to applaud Elinor when, notwithstanding her own secret distresses in love, she gallantly shoulders the burden of looking after Mrs. Jennings with small talk and continual courtesy, because that pleasant but obstreperous lady is the girl's hostess; self-discipline is a fine quality (until the owner informs us of it), and throughout their stay in Conduit Street, during the bewilderment and agony of Marianne's betrayal by Willoughby, Elinor never forgets to be punctual at meals, to apologise to Mrs. Jennings, thank her, entertain her, excuse and cover Marianne's wild behaviour, and listen patiently to accounts of Charlotte's accouchement.

The Bennets of "Pride and Prejudice" had difficulty in remaining a united group, owing to the predicament created even before the girls were born, by a father who had married a woman for whose quality he could have no shred of respect; unlike the younger people in Jane Austen's novels, he did not even try. Mr. Bennet was quick-witted and scholarly, Mrs. Bennet uneducated and unreasonable. She brought into the

family circle a temperament, favouritism, and a desire for power without the slightest knowledge of what to do with it. Elizabeth was on her father's side; Lydia on her mother's. Jane Bennet, the eldest daughter, was so sweet-tempered that I am inclined to give her credit for whatever went right in the household. Elizabeth Bennet may be everybody's favourite heroine, but she is a little pert for my taste. Jane was the affectionate peace-maker; and if she was also a tiny bit of a bore, Bingley was so arranged by his creator as not to notice it.

The young Morlands, of "Northanger Abbey," were luckier than the Bennets or the Elliots. Mr. and Mrs. Morland prove themselves the only sensible mother and father in all Jane Austen's novels when they refuse to fuss unduly at the sudden unannounced arrival of a daughter packed home to them at an hour's notice by her host, General Tilney, travelling alone all day at the tender age of seventeen, without preparation and nearly without money—"It is always good for young people to be put upon exerting themselves," said Mrs. Morland cheerfully—though we find her slightly obtuse when, not perceiving that poor Catherine is drenched with love, she goes off to fetch an article in the *Mirror*, "about young girls who have been spoilt for home by great acquaintance."

As for the coupling of brother and sister, we have Eleanor and Henry Tilney, Catherine and James Morland, Mary and Henry Crawford, Fanny and William Price, Fitzwilliam and Georgiana Darcy, all unselfish in their endeavours to further the interests and happiness one of the other. Had we known less of the real Austen household, and had there been more of wistfulness in these descriptions, we might have suspected the author of nostalgia which rises from contemplation of that which we can never have ourselves. But certainly there is no wistfulness and no mystery. Jane Austen lived in the midst of

a daylight family; the shadows, for her, lay across love, not across the home.

We know from her letters that she excelled as an aunt; her nieces were warmly attached to her. An auntly relationship is always tilted at a difficult angle, so she should be given high credit for her achievement in this. She was a subjective novelist, and naturally aunts play a part in her family sagas—Aunt Norris of “Mansfield Park,” a highly objectionable part. Aunt Norris was that rare thing in Jane Austen, a detestable character without any redeeming point, except that for the ardent Jane-ite she must ever be dearer than the sweetest of living aunts, in her miserly adjustments, her perpetual discomfitures and her undaunted self-importance. Frank Churchill’s aunt does not come out too well either, though we learn her whims and caprices only at second hand. But Emma is a merry and affectionate young aunt to Isabella’s children. And Elizabeth Bennet’s Aunt Gardiner is also her friend and confidante, which must have happened as seldom then as now. Miss Bates, too, Jane Fairfax’s aunt, for all that we cannot stop laughing at her absurdities, in her aunt capacity is shining and flawless; she would have offered herself to be torn to pieces if that could have eased her niece of one headache; while Granny Bates, an example to domineering Victorian matriarchs, sits humbly in her chair and interferes with nobody.

Samuel Butler appears to have shared Jane Austen’s stern views on children out of their proper place. He leaves us a pathetic note on his failure to cope with them—all the more pathetic in that we can so readily understand as well the point of view of the small boy to whom he made tentative overtures, and who immediately burst into a roar of terror and tears: “Mummy, he’s *talking* to me!”

That *poor* child! that feeling of awful despair, not at anything that was said to him, but just: "Mummy, he's *talking* to me." How often most of us have swung helplessly between submission and protest under the same horrid circumstances; and how nice, how very nice of Butler to have got the idea, even while, so to speak, he figured at the wrong end of it! Butler in his "Note-Books" rarely lets us down; that is why I was stunned to find that once he had been a fellow-sinner with my juvenile self; once, without any sign of recognition, he had dropped plumb into whimsy as coquettish as any Barrie at his Barrie-est:

I have often told my son that he must begin by finding me a wife to become his mother who shall satisfy both himself and me. But this is only one of the many rocks on which we have hitherto split. We should never have got on together; I should have had to cut him off with a shilling either for laughing at Homer, or for refusing to laugh at him, or both, or neither, but still cut him off. So I settled the matter long ago by turning a deaf ear to his importunities and sticking to it that I would not get him at all. Yet his thin ghost visits me at times and, though he knows that it is no use pestering me further, he looks at me so wistfully and reproachfully that I am half-inclined to turn tail, take my chance about his mother and ask him to let me get him after all. But I should show a clean pair of heels if he said "yes."

Besides, he would probably be a girl.

(Oh, Daddy, I don't want to be a might-have-been!)

On looking through my packet of rough notes for this portion of the book, I again find them rather more cryptic and incoherent than I can deal with without the kind assistance of Gentle Reader. The names Butler and Barrie, however, twist in and out persistently as in a fugue; so that with their aid I might have been able to carry off incoherence in a more non-

chalant style but for several jottings which, as far as I can see, have nothing to do with either author:

One blunt and tactless sentence can undo the devotion of months or years. Yet you need not plant a rhinoceros hoof in deepest mud before upsetting a friend, for I have always believed there is more touchiness (called by the owner "sensitiveness") in almost every nature than we realise or care to realise. Antagonism. E. V. Lucas letter (and meeting) hitches on. [Yes, but does it?]

Ballet of London house in fashionable square being repainted for Spring Season. Whole thing played from outside. Décor of gaily swinging platforms. Warbling artisans. Pots and brushes etc. Ladders. Window-boxes. Awnings.

Memory of four-leafed shamrock that appeared accidentally in every pot at Mrs. Homer P. Brandon's St. Patrick's Day lunch-party.

Happy marriages are not *solemnised*; they simply happen. But trying to readjust a marriage which has gone wrong is like trying to restick a stamp on a letter when it has already been used and torn off.

As far as I can see, that final item speaks for itself; so does the fantastic ballet of London house-painters, though presently with regard to that I find another note: "The English public when it encounters fantasy is liable to jib like a cyclist when he meets the Loch Ness Monster." But this is a somewhat old-fashioned reaction; nowadays any cyclist would know exactly how to deal with any blandly smiling Fifth-Columnist roughly disguised as a Monster or the Lady of the Loch.

Mrs. Homer P. Brandon was an American lady who gave us a lunch party in honour of Walt Disney; and as it fell on St. Patrick's Day, we each found a little pot of shamrock beside our napkins. A charming idea. And almost immediately someone gave a squeal of triumph, for in *her* plant she had found a four-leafed shamrock. Green with envy, we all con-

gratulated her, until another squeal and another and another, gradually diminishing in triumph, betrayed that our thoughtful hostess had done things thoroughly, and, in the spirit of the mother who says, "I love all my children alike and am careful to make no difference," had concealed one four-leafed shamrock in every pot. It served, unconsciously, as a deserved reprimand to superstition. The poor lady was perplexed and disappointed when we all turned a bit sour on our "luck," affecting not to believe in it much.

As for the outburst on the subject of the human rhinoceros tribe, I can only dismiss it as a psychological discovery which might have been expressed better; obviously inspired by an echo from E. V. Lucas's letter which I quoted before: "and now I am convinced that no one could write a novel about the essential antagonism of man and woman better than you." I have no desire to write that book, mainly, as I have already explained, that one's instinct rejects any subject proffered on a plate with parsley sauce. Butler says in his "Note-Books":

Do not hunt for subjects, let them choose you, not you them. Only do that which insists upon being done and runs right up against you, hitting you in the eye until you do it. This calls you and you had better attend to it, and do it as well as you can. But till called in this way do nothing.

I know very little of the life of Samuel Butler although I possess Festing Jones' well-known biography; but then I also possess (and no doubt you will have guessed by now) the volume of "Note-Books"; and so, whenever I pick it up on a definite errand of Butler discovery, I linger and am caught and held, like a child in vain trying to pass a sweet-shop, or a butcher-boy a cricket-match. Even "The Way of All Flesh" does not hold my love as fast as the "Note-Books"; though, with "Vanity Fair" and "Gulliver's Travels," this satire on the

smug smooth self-rationalisations of the Rev. Theodore Pontifex and his wife Christina, and their method of bringing up their children, is one of the three best in the English language.

Frequently I had heard the exclamation: "O God! O Montreal!"; but not until I got among Butler's "Note-Books" did I discover that it was the refrain of an amusing satirical poem he had written on discovering that a custodian of the Montreal Museum of Natural History had stowed away a statue of the Greek Discobolus in a lumber-room because he thought it "rather vulgar":

*The Discobolus is put here because he is vulgar—
He has neither vest nor pants with which to
cover his limbs;
I, Sir, am a person of most respectable connections—
My brother-in-law is haberdasher to Mr. Spurgeon.
O God! O Montreal!*

Irony, delivered in the soft tones of understatement, can always give me more chuckling delight than mishaps from a chair drawn away suddenly; from banana-skins or drawing-pins or bowls of water adroitly placed. They result in the same thing, but divide into mental and physical terms. The man with a witty cynical tongue or pen is a debunker: "Here is dignity, here is pomposity; let me see what I can do about them." And the small boy placing the drawing-pin point upwards on the form-master's chair is up to the same game, anxious to witness the same collapse.

Among contemporary authors, Somerset Maugham takes an almost voluptuous pleasure in understatement. The air of delicate melancholy with which he slays the first-born adjective, betrays a not too creditable affinity with King Herod. And nothing can exceed the courtesy with which he shows out ex-

citement by the front door, affecting not to be aware that it will come strolling back, its hands in its pockets, by a side entrance. Maugham has too frequently been called a cynic. His quality for real tenderness in writing should absolve him from the charge, though he likes to keep it where the blind man keeps the black hat in the dark room. Youth is liable to be dashingly cynical, but Maugham during his later years has developed a much more subtle idiom. I would call it the technique of enough rope. He gently spreads out the object for attack and exposure, flat. And leaves it. You look at it—and suddenly realise from the very way it lies there that, not only has it been given enough rope, but it has already hanged itself without any apparent assistance from Mr. Maugham. For it is always essential to realise that he (and Mark Antony) speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke.

There has been a tendency, however, during the last decade among our first-class authors, to carry the debunking process rather too far. Taking "debunking" to mean a spiritual form of debuggling, it seems a pity to divest of its trousers that which may already be trouserless. "Bogus" is the word we use nowadays for an abhorrent mixture of sham in our midst, or "phony"—both of American origin. (The Rev. Theodore Pontifex was exquisitely bogus.) "Etym. dub." the Concise Oxford Dictionary adds of "bogus"; but of "phony," in the 1934 addenda, the etym. appears to be even more than dub., for it puts only a ?. Any sane astringent campaign against what is bogus—"thrasonic, palatial, and unduly elated with self," says the dictionary—is bound to benefit humanity; for debunkers are good Crusaders. Yet in close analogy with the fact that a professional psychoanalyst knows that he must himself be psychoanalysed before he dare begin to practise, is realisation that before, exasperated, you can set to work debunking others, you must conscientiously debunk yourself.

The great satirists, Swift and Heine and Butler and Pope, Montaigne, Molière, Anatole France, are all debunkers. In our own days, Somerset Maugham, Aldous Huxley, Evelyn Waugh, Dorothy Parker and the whole Ernest Hemingway group in America are of the same school, sickened by sham ecstasies in literature, sham respectabilities, sham sentimentality. Yet every now and then in that witty-minded, clear-sighted and disillusioned generation, I find a curious little panic mixed up with the debunking motive; a quick gesture of the arm and hand to protect the head from blows, as though to say: "I'd better be the first to pretend this was not written in the crusading spirit, but simply from a business point of view, in the same way that Vincent Crummies made use of his two tubs and a pump; because then nobody else can point it out afterwards." More often than not, in this mood, they rapidly turn towards a cracked mirror and describe what they see, to make sure that their wry view of the world would not be complete without an equally wry view of themselves. Then astringency always proves a salutary corrective to Noble writers who carry their deeper thoughts at arms' length at the head of a slow procession. Yet to disinherit every idea with an "I" in it, cut it off without a shilling for maintenance, may in itself lead every present generation to lose faith in a past generation. Nearly all cynics are reformers; but not all reformers walk in such terror as those of today, lest sincere depths of feeling might lead them to pomposity, and pomposity to bunk. The true satirist has often adopted the method of disguising his own sophisticated outlook by pretending to the simple mind of the hero of his chronicle; himself throughout to seem as Candide or Gulliver; to marvel with them on what strange things befall them on their pilgrimages, and in what curious manner mankind disports itself; with them gradually

to learn of knavery and folly; perhaps even to practise it.

Undoubtedly sardonic humour, while it pleases those who (metaphorically) stand well behind the player scoring bull's-eyes at the dartboard, is liable to cause also a certain uneasiness in the air. In a comic paper, a small boy lying in bed was shown saying wistfully: "Mummy, I've thought *all* my thoughts twice, and some of them three times over." This is a feeling well known to all of us when trying in vain to get to sleep. I quoted it once, and a small cold voice in the corner of the room said: "Quite a good description of most of our authors." The same small cold voice, on hearing a wrathful criticism, "I'll make him sing on the other side of his mouth," replied with resignation: "We have no reason to suppose the song will be any better than on this side." A soft almost affectionate delivery can add much to the effect of an ironic remark; a certain first-class actor achieved his well-earned reputation by the masterful way he made the least of every line. Voltaire in "Candide" uses a style as innocent and inoffensive as stroking a pussy, and so bland and plausible that butter would remain unmelted in his mouth. We perpetually mistake flippancy for cynicism. You are flippant when you not only realise the follies and hypocrisies, the self-seeking motives and absurdities of others, but also realise, unresentfully, that you share them; flippancy may be, on that discovery, the only thing left to you.

Evelyn Waugh, on whom I placed my money and my shirt as well, as the most tragic, the most significant of our younger cynics, confessed in "Decline and Fall," "Vile Bodies" and "A Handful of Dust" a not wholly camouflaged sentiment of tenderness for that group of savages which overran England during the period of post-last-war. Those absurd desperate touching creatures, infatuated with their own lack of heroism,

were shown to be as helpless as characters in Greek drama; boxed up in a decade of undisciplined silliness. He revealed more compassion than hate in his portrayal of the grotesque situations into which they strayed; compassion, but never surprise; a born satirist does not allow himself either comment or surprise, certainly not condemnation. His style is impudent, nervous and elliptic. Because the delineation of mankind drifting towards futility for lack of understanding and leadership, is a universal theme, his characters will not become old-fashioned, though prophets have wagged their heads and murmured: Doesn't he realise that that's all over and done with?" So is Waterloo all over and done with, but we still sharply appreciate Thackeray's "Vanity Fair," and the flippancy, the compassion, the ironic power and sardonic humour he showed in his treatment of Becky Sharp, Rawdon Crawley, Jos Sedley, George Osborne, and poor little Amelia. Evelyn Waugh, like Butler and Swift, is a romantic who has managed to keep his head. Stella Benson, a satirist who died too soon, wrote diffusing the same rueful flavour of bruised almonds. And, strangely enough, so did Barrie every now and then, when too rarely he freed himself from that odd compulsion to bring in his train of Quips and Cranks and Wanton Wiles, Nods and Becks and Wreathèd Smiles. Barrie, indeed, could be more bitter than the whole collection of satirists put together. He knew with devastating certainty that if you lift a toadstool, you will not find an elf asleep nor a Lost Boy; nor a wolf nor a pirate nor a policeman; the odds are that you will find nothing but emptiness, a sterile hollow in the ground. Barrie's short play "The Will" and about half a page in the last act of "Mary Rose" contained so much bitterness that one is afraid to call it truth. Max Beerbohm remains our most suave, gentle blue-eyed ironist; with the delicate precision of William Tell, he halves the apple every time. For proof of this, read

his short stories in "Seven Men," and his delectable parodies in the volume called "A Christmas Garland."

Parody is the most delightful and the least insulting of all forms of criticisms; nor is it, as many have supposed, the gift of mimicry with exaggeration. No, in my experience it is an infection: if you are *sensible* (the French, not the English meaning), then you deliberately expose yourself to the author whom you wish to parody; deliberately read and re-read him until you have caught his style like an illness, and rapidly display your symptoms in parody. Presently the illness passes off as though it might be measles; but meanwhile there is your parody, fresh and finished and covered with spots.

"She was a grand girl. You're drunk, she said. But I wasn't so drunk, either. I mean, I'd had a few, but I could see straight; and I could hold the wheel. I had the headlights on, too. To hell with those lamps, she said, and switched them down. Do you want to dazzle everything on the road, she said, so it rushes into us? You're nuts." This is not by a tough American author, but by Rose Macaulay, who, from the excellence of her parody, must have been pretty badly allergic to that sort of thing, and I dare say went on dreamily writing in the same style for at least half an hour after she had finished her allotted length of ridicule.

Being allergic to the style of Sir James Barrie, I once wrote a short play which I called "The House That Likes to Be Let Furnished." I still cannot help thinking that was a good title.

On glancing through the books and bundles of my rough notes for several years, I was a little upset by the complacency with which I had scribbled the words "Good Title" over and over again, where it would have been more exact as well as more seemly to have written "Possible Title." Judge for yourselves:

"The Lord Protector." That was meant to work out as a cynical modern story in no way connected with Cromwell.

"The Streets of Askalon." And that, I imagine, would concern itself with a group unable to keep a secret, and the damage they did.

"Everyone Sent Their Love" was to have been a very bitter story, and so was "Today I Have Been Happy," which is the beginning of a poem by Rupert Brooke; but indeed I have myself been able to say it, not often but gratefully, at the end of certain days. Perhaps if any of us could write of pure happiness as easily as we write in the spirit of irony, "Today I Have Been Happy" might be the most enduring, the loveliest of stories, with the title fully, simply and sincerely meant. "Pippa Passes" might, of course, have been entitled "Today I Have Been Happy," and all the Pollyanna books. Edna Millay wrote a poem which catches a night of full happiness by so many irrelevant and idiot causes that it is only by sheer miracle that she catches it at all:

*We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable—
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,
We lay on a hilltop underneath the moon;
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon.*

*We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;
And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,
From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;
And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,
And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.*

*We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
We bailed, "Good morrow, mother!" to a shawl-covered head,
And bought a morning paper, which we neither of us read;
And she wept, "God bless you!" for the apples and pears,
And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.*

"The Plumber Never Called Once" is a parody title to be coupled with "The House That Likes to Be Let Furnished"; yet I cannot help feeling a deeper, more poignant note in "The Plumber Never Called Once" than in "The Postman Always Rings Twice."

"That Die Unmarried" I intended obviously for a sort of Chekhov spinster story. "Bright Phœbus," from the same primrose lines, I have already used for a short story—a little ashamed of using it, for lines like those should be safe from the passing robber.

Here is a somewhat lewd title which would fit any disillusioned autobiography: "Said the Queen of Spain." ("One month's leisure, then at it again; it's a hell of a life, said the...")

"Fourscore and Eight." That would not be bad, either, for biography or autobiography; but I can equally well see fiction springing out of it.

"Figure of Speech": a tale of a much too verbose character, all words and no deeds.

"Man Between Colours"—about a gipsy forecast.

"Invisible Mending."

"Whoever Wakes in England." Originally conceived as a touching story of nostalgia interpreted through an English gun-dog, spaniel or retriever, pointer or setter, taken to live for a while in Italy or the South of France; but I am inclined

to feel now that it is the title for an essay, and that I shall write that essay myself.

I find the next two titles are for collections of short stories; one I shall keep secret because it might come in handy, and I know from experience and from the wails of other authors how particularly difficult it is to name these collections; the eternal plaint is, "They've all been used up ages ago." Shakespeare obviously felt the same when he flung away on "As You Like It." "Falling Off a Log" sounds fun if the short stories happen to be light and merry enough, but much too complacent. "If it is as easy as all that," every critic might remark coldly, "then why not make them a little better?"

"The Man Who Never Went to Macclesfield" carries associations with Chekhov's "Three Sisters," those girls who never went to Moscow; but many of us know that man personally, a pathetic little fellow who came round and begged for nothing but his fare back to Macclesfield, back to his wife and family, and he would trouble us no more . . . His technique was excellent, only he had not grasped that authors and actors and artists compare notes. He chose authors and actors and artists because they were so tender-hearted. One of them finally had him put in quod.

While I was reading "Ricochets" by André Maurois, a fellow author at her embroidery in the same room interrupted with a plaintive: "I wish you'd teach me how to make French knots." And "French Knots" seemed just the title Monsieur Maurois wanted; an English library subscriber might have hesitated how to pronounce "Ricochets" and finally have skipped it, as, when I was children, I used to skip pronouncing Badroulboudour and Scheherazade and Phœbe, but leave them as large shapeless sounds like cows moving in a field behind the hedge. But French knots have just that twinkling quality about them, that gay neatness, that Latin sanity, the sophis-

ticated trick of achieving them with three sly twists of the silk round a needle and there you are, which is essential in brief tales. Short stories can be divided into Good Stories, Bad Stories and Little Slices of Life. Our own writers in the Little Slices of Life Category, A. E. Coppard and Gerald Bullett and Malachi Whitaker and H. E. Bates, rather follow the Chekhov and Katherine Mansfield tradition; their stories are worked out with skill, with subtlety and passion, but always convey a strange and sinister feeling that everybody in them, although they may not be mad or dead, will be mad or dead shortly after the story had ended.

If any of you should be wondering why I am putting down all these brilliant and expensive titles and leaving them unprotected, I would reply that it is almost as impossible to fit a story to a ready-made title as it is to reach the top of the hill by putting the cart before the horse. A title must rise from your subject as Aphrodite rose from the foam; it is unlikely to find the foam rising from Aphrodite, unless in that sort of film where the heroine has to be all but hidden from the audience because she is in her bath. By way of precaution, and speaking in the optimistic spirit of every headmistress, I put my readers on their honour not to use any of these titles; nevertheless, I fear sorrowfully that for reasons I have just given I shall be unable to use any of them myself. Once, years ago, I dreamt a title, "The Man Who Couldn't Knock"; dreamt it quite clearly, typed in capital letters across the top of a page, and underneath, the blurred smaller type indicating a story. So, feeling a sort of menacing promise about it, I tried to write the story; but no editor would accept it, not even gratis.

"A good title," said Samuel Butler, "should aim at making what follows as far as possible superfluous to those who know anything of the subject."

I was wondering, at this juncture of going through my

notebooks, whether Butler, in his "Note-Books," had said anything about titles, so I looked it up. I might have known; seven and a quarter pages, a whole section under "Titles and Subjects."

"The Happy Mistress. Fifteen mistresses apply for three cooks and the mistress who thought herself nobody is chosen by the beautiful and accomplished cook.

"The Complete Drunkard. He would not give money to sober people, but said they would only eat it and send their children to school with it.

"The Flying Balance. The ghost of an old cashier haunts a ledger, so that the books always refuse to balance by the sum of, say, £1.15.11."

The rest of the seven and a quarter pages you can read for yourselves, and if you happen to open the volume accidentally in a different place, you will read that too. Indeed, I doubt if you will ever stop reading, and if you will ever come back to these pages at all (deprecation is the most deadly form of self-indulgence). How I wish that this dead, this vitally living literary love of mine had been given any other name by his parents, than Samuel! There is so very little to be done with Samuel; practically nothing. Reginald Percival Butler—But no, they had to call him Samuel. And did he grow up to be an Infant? Far from it. Read about the sad end of Samuel-Ernest in "The Way of All Flesh." But I forgot. Of course you have read it.

"The Infant Samuel," painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, hung on my nursery wall (he had something to put up with, too, had Joshua, in the way of names!). His Cherub Choir were on my silver hairbrushes. That was why I said to a young girl the other day: "You've got a face like the back of a hairbrush." I meant to be flattering, but she was a little startled.

An admirable sense of mischief led Cecil Aldin to give his

autobiography the title of "Time I Was Dead." He had been standing near two men who were looking at his drawings, and one of them said, "Who's that by?" and the other said, "Cecil Aldin." And the first had said: "Cecil Aldin? Time he was dead."

Titles for biography and autobiography, as for volumes of short stories, cause the author much unrest and trouble. The last title that I chanced to find among my notes was "Charles-My-Friend." I thought this might do for the sort of book I am writing now, a loose form of autobiography, patched with memories, arguments, contrasts, opinions, quotations, dialogue, childhood, description, nostalgia, criticism and so forth. But it did not do. The formula was to aim at a sort of exasperated Dr. Johnson effect at feeling the lack of a Boswell and having to be your own Boswell (which cannot be done without lapses into bad taste and insufficient modesty) or to create a dummy Boswell: "Charles-My-Friend," in fact, once such a familiar character in drawing-room comedy.

Autobiography and biography at their best make fascinating reading in wartime, unless this may happen to be my purely personal bias which has nothing to do with wartime and a great deal to do with "Be your age," which, as I have remarked before, is fifty. I believe that the first thing we look for in autobiography is not what the writer has achieved, where he has been, what he has done, but chiefly whether he has been in his life happy or unhappy; and if the former, what has brought him happiness; and if he has never achieved it, why not. This is not from motives of prying curiosity; it is questing for a secret that affects all of us vitally, to which actual experience may contribute something more valuable than the cosmic impersonalities of philosophy and the cheaper comfort of articles on the theme. Reading autobiography, we

watch with some excitement to see what man emerges from among the boscaje, the small twirls and shapes and shadows of leaves. Often we perceive he is not quite as tolerant as he hopes; on the live-and-let-live axiom, most men and women are six of one to considerably less than half a dozen of the other. Yet this is a not unreasonable ration; for we should only "let live" in that slack and genial tone when everybody is happy enough in their own way, not restless and spiritually undernourished as most of us were in the years preceding this present war. I myself prefer autobiography to biography. Oscar Wilde once remarked that the book of life begins with a man and a woman in a garden: "But," he added, "it ends with Revelation." The conscientious biographer (not those debonair villains who have made whoopee with their victims' souls) is apt to look back so often over his shoulder for reference and geographical detail that his subject is liable to become no more capable of revelations than poor Mrs. Lot in her latter days.

George Moore was perfectly equipped for autobiography when he wrote his "Memoirs of a Dead Life," and so was Marcel Proust when he wrote "Recherche d'un Temps Perdu." Both titles are a flicker of downcast eyelids which did not deceive us for one moment; Life and Time are neither "dead" nor "*perdu*." With them, as with every right-minded autobiographer, the past runs parallel with the present, a lively urchin beseeching a coin and a pat on the head; his childhood is so alive that he has only to put out his hand to touch it; we might even go further and say that often he makes an unsuccessful attempt *not* to put out his hand to touch it; in other words, the most attractive and vital autobiography is likely to reveal the author as a victim to infantilism: his marvellous memory is a willing ally to nostalgia; and his craving for strong drink expresses itself, so to speak, in a spiritual

orgy on the discovery of a photo of Grandpa-and-all-the-Aunties, taken seventy years ago on a holiday at Folkestone. If at such irrepressible moments it would seem a good thing that the writer should have been told to go away and boil his head, the answer would be that here in this autobiography he has done so to some purpose: not hard-boiled, but as you like it, with the outside firm and the yolk still fluid. John van Druten wrote just such an autobiography a few years ago, called "The Way to the Present"—very engaging in its absorption, its honesty, its serious attention to the business in hand (autobiography, he seemed to be saying, and rightly, is no moment to assume a distrait air). The result, rich and supple in detail, proved anew that there exists, after all, only one universal child whose experiences, told with the fresh light of wonder on them, the seaweed still sparkling from the receding wave, must prompt every reader to exclaim with surprise: "But *I* was that child, only I had forgotten."

Is it the longing to repossess one's childhood which by its own ardour creates a good memory, or vice versa? At one period, led by "Sinister Street," the fashion was to devote even more pages to adolescence, which, especially during wartime, is bound to resolve itself into an epic of dislocation, moral and physical.

The best confessions are frank but not repentant; egos seldom repent, for even their acknowledged faults get sublimated in the process of writing about them.

A large and umbrageous family tree is a gift to the true autobiographer, for here he can disport himself like a happy monkey swinging up and down through slices of bright sunlight from one leafy branch to another. It may be merely a trick of memory, but it does appear to me that most people who write their autobiographies have an exceptional quantity of aunts and uncles and cousins and grandparents, a proces-

sion of amusing characters that prance down the pages, flourishing little gay personal anecdotes like dishes of juicy coloured fruits: goblin market. Here, however, we meet with another danger, especially if the writer's family and friends include too many vital or famous figures; for he is apt in the spirit of irritable humility to leave out himself altogether. "You won't want to hear about me," is no spirit in which to conceive autobiography; opposite in extremes from the man who seems to be saying: "Here's me, and you won't want to hear about anyone else." Probably the most perfect autobiography ever written, Edmund Gosse's "Father and Son," is the work of a man who never makes the mistake of expressing doubt of his own power to interest his reader with the most trivial memory. Had he prefaced such incidents with a phrase like "I fear this may seem too insignificant for your interest," interest would immediately flutter a restless wing and be off into the blue. It is a good general rule for the writer, not only of autobiography, never to allow a sentence to discourage the reader by taking a flatly negative form where its claim is richly positive. (Emma Woodhouse may tell us that Miss Bates is a bore, but Jane Austen herself never does so.) Sometimes the very essence of autobiography is giving the exuberant Self a joy-ride, unchecked by reproof. Yet a further peril of the autobiographer who from the first buries himself in the sand so that only a little toe is showing, arises when he is a professional man and devotes far too many pages to what we know only too well as "generous tribute"; a list of all the people "but for whom" he would not be here today, finally leads to an impression that he is indeed not here today. ("Gone Tomorrow" suddenly strikes me as another quite good title for an autobiography—or has it been used?) A subconscious motive may be that they wish to defy any rumour that professionals are jealous of one another. Personally I have seen very

little jealousy either on the stage or in literature (of musicians and painters I know too little); the professionals love the thing itself, the play, the page, the poem so truly that they will speak ruthlessly against those who they honestly consider are doing damage to their abstract cause; but they also hold forth just as fluently in praise, though perhaps fluency leaps too quickly into exaggeration; an austere statement made just under the line instead of prancing above it would always prove more effective.

Within the last four years I have especially relished the (somewhat dissimilar) autobiographies of Majorie Bowen, stamped with black bitter sorrow, and several joyous Mr. Agates. And Somerset Maugham's mental autobiography, where his fastidious and apparently detached style proves that a summing-up need by no means be a coughing-up.

A really tidy autobiography begins with the words "My first memory," etc. It is a little too late for me to consider tidiness in this volume. Nevertheless, *my* first memory is of standing at the foot of my cot on my fourth birthday and saying defiantly to my nurse: "I'm four years old, and now I can do as I like *always!*" And was I right about that, or was I right? I am incapable of expressing myself richly and grimly enough on that subject without borrowing from American idiom. Shakespeare could; but in his case the music-halls summed up the matter in the chorus of a song: "What You've Never Had You'll Never Miss." Unlike those autobiographers who are enamoured of adolescence, I was not in the least like the maiden who hung about for hours with reluctant feet where the brook and river meet; on the contrary, my feet plunged quickly, anxious to be done with that awkward bewildered business of being a schoolgirl. But young girlhood was not so much better, and I slid into my forties without a single spasm of wistfulness. The only thing which

might make me feel that life ended at fifty would be a question of health and the slowing-up of physical agility; but of the latter, I am afraid I never had much; my first impulse whenever I saw a mountain was never to get to the summit, but to sit down patiently and wait till it came to me. We call this the Mahomet Complex. It argues against a lack of tidiness in my metabolism that I remember nothing till I was four, and then suddenly remember far too much until I was about twenty, and then again pass through many blurred periods, many ellipses, until about ten years ago. An advantage of being middle-aged is that you accept (though only if you have to) a change for the worse, instead of fighting it like a drunken donkey. Also you can deal adequately with your social lapses, and calmly shake hands with the foot on which you have dropped the brick. When I was in Hollywood about six years ago I was invited to a big supper-party at the house of a film magnate. He had never heard of me, I had never heard of him, we had never met before, and so everything was set fair from the start. When I recovered my breath after the first onslaught of grandeur, and realised that the banqueting-hall was shaped like a ship with portholes, furnished like a Provençal farmhouse, and hung with golden Chinese tapestries, I remarked to the man beside me: "What a room! I can hardly bear it." He replied doubtfully, not sure of my tone: "Why, sure, I had a lot of trouble getting these old Avignon dower-chests." Proving that he was, in fact, my host. Once I would have rushed forth with a scarlet face and sat wretchedly alone all the evening, muttering: "I'm a failure." Now I repeated, somewhat altering the original inflection: "*What* a room! I can hardly bear it . . . I'm eaten up with envy." When I was very young indeed I was disgracefully intolerant; when I passed into the thirties, I prided myself on having learnt a beautiful tolerance; that,

however, I realise now was nothing but laziness. After a few years of it I began to be heartily intolerant again, which meant that I had sorted out and tidied up as much as possible what matters and what doesn't, who matters and who doesn't, what I have to do and what I needn't, what I have to wear and fashion-my-foot, what I have to say and what I can let-it-go-at-that. And here is another important thing which I have learnt since I was forty or thereabouts; that after shock and disillusion, I can scramble on more or less the same as before, and gradually, believe it or not, get to like people just as much again. This is a very pleasant lesson to have over and done with; you do not have to learn twice that there is no such thing as permanent embitterment, however dark and picturesque it may sound.

Those of us who have read "Little Women" will always remember how Jo rushed out and sold her glorious long mane of chestnut hair so as to contribute towards her father's comforts where he lay seriously wounded during something which was called nebulously "the War." I suppose in Louisa M. Alcott's time her American girl readers knew with fair certainty which war she meant—she could have had no idea she was writing for England and posterity as well. There was a brief border-line period when we ourselves, if somebody mentioned the War, had to say: "Do you mean the last war, or this one?" Now we know with sardonic certainty that we need not insult every precarious moment by referring to "the current war." With a most singular lack of intelligence, I read through "Little Women" and "Good Wives," not once, but again and again, in a dreamy and incurious fashion, without grasping for a moment that this was an American family living in Concord near Boston. I suppose I was so fascinated by the characters in the narrative that my mind slipped what must otherwise have seemed certain eccentricities of speech and

custom. For me, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy were not specifically English girls, nor were the Marches a fabulous family in no-man's-land; they were of all-man's-land, as indeed they always will be. The theme and feeling of "Little Women" and its sequel are universal, and the four American sisters probably have a thousand points of affinity with Chekhov's Russian sisters, or with the Yorkshire Brontë sisters (as re-created for us in vivid, sensitive biographies by May Sinclair and by Abbé Ernest Dimnet). A year or two ago I read enthralled the biography of Louisa M. Alcott herself, realising at last which war it was; realising that the Marches were as much the Alcotts as the Alcotts were the Marches; realising also that my more subtle interest was now in the manner in which, for fascinating secret reasons of her own mind, Louisa-Jo altered the truth instead of allowing it all to remain a perfect fit. That bit about Professor Bhaer, for instance; we wondered a little when Hollywood shaved off his beard and turned him into a Frenchman, but Miss Alcott herself surely did a Hollywood act years before the first rough shacks were put up outside Los Angeles, by allotting Professor Bhaer to Jo as loving husband and glorious end to spinsterhood, when in actual fact he was the property of her sister May-Amy. Yes, she did odd things between reality and the story of the Jo-Laurie-Amy trio. When I wrote "The Matriarch" and my subsequent family books, taking reality for a foundation, I made certain changes which now look arbitrary but at the time were for professional reasons; that quiet ruthlessness by which one not only uses fact to make fancy's holiday, but has to slay it for the same reason.

The older I grow, the more I develop a lust for biography and autobiography; treating fiction, unless it be superlatively good, as one treats a meal without much appetite, toying with it, nibbling, dragging it round the plate and leaving more than

half. Any period will do for me; and, I imagine, any subject without predilection; it all depends on the way the matter is treated. I had not the faintest interest, for instance, in Alexander Cruden who compiled a very useful Concordance in 1737, but I found myself absorbed in Edith Olivier's "Eccentric Life of Alexander Cruden." I have already mentioned Edmund Gosse's "Father and Son" and the Alcott biography. Choosing at random from my reading of the last few years, I would not willingly have missed Meier-Graefe's "Van Gogh"; Daphne du Maurier's "Gerald" and "The du Mauriers"; Stefan Zweig's "Mental Healers" (Mesmer, Mary Baker Eddy and Freud); Helen Ashton's "William and Dorothy" (which included provocative glimpses of Coleridge and his son Hartley, Southey, Charles and Mary Lamb, as well as William and Dorothy Wordsworth); the biography of the James family at the beginning of the volume of Alice James' journal; and a volume by Esther Meynell recently published, "English Spinster," about Mary Mitford who was Public Chump Number One in her illusions about Daddy, though I believe the Brontës also had an opinion about Daddy unsubstantiated by later research into fact. Louisa Alcott joins the little worshipful company of daughters, shrewd and perceptive in all things except in this one matter; we should like to have heard a little more from her of Bronson Alcott as he was, and less as she made him. (I definitely prefer biography when it is not given a slightly fictional bend and called "Hey Nonny Nonny" or some such airy title, so that readers cannot tell who might be the subject till they see reviews or the subtitle.) The Meier-Graefe biography of Van Gogh and a much shorter one by Peter Burra set me musing on the peculiarly conditioned relationship between a genius and his essential lay brother who from beginning to end carries the material burdens for a person with a creative gift. Most artists need this sort of steady

quality for ever beside them: a quality that reassures them more by being genuinely unafraid of life than by bravely and unselfishly stifling down its own panic. To say that it is not all jam to be lay brother to a genius is an understatement; if there should exist an antithesis to all-jam, we have it here. Artists are rarely convincing in fiction or on the stage. Their unfaithfulness, arrogance and ingratitude are depicted rather more than life-size, just as their masterpieces are carefully carried reversed in order that audiences may never catch a glimpse of them. Vincent Van Gogh had not these revolting qualities, and as far as his masterpieces are concerned, the price of a Van Gogh picture is now twice as much as he himself spent in his whole lifetime. What he most longed for was the "still life" that was denied him. His temperament was so violent, so menacing and strange, that it burst away from the style which biography imposes. He tried to tear his pictures out of the actual face of nature; to paint trees and fields which waved up in crackling flame to the sky. As Burra pointed out, he had the same challenging quality as Prometheus; he stole fire and was metaphorically punished by a vulture. Yet his touching qualities of gratitude and deep humility prostrated him in genuine admiration (and complete lack of taste) before very second-rate gods in painting and literature. A pleasing glimpse of this violent, uncouth, blazing, inarticulate creature as a young man, shows him in a school at Isleworth, reverently telling the boys the story of "The Wide, Wide World." The "lay brother" to a genius falls into line and marches to the music; he must genuinely not mind if the genius goes off on his own creative affairs; he must never cling, but be there, unafraid and uninjured, when or if the genius happens to return and want him. No one can be a lay brother without love, but love alone is frequently not enough; it should never exhibit a martyred quality, nor expect gratitude, yet should

be capable of appreciating gratitude. Not, therefore, a masochist, nor a doormat; nor, certainly, a fussier over domestic and maternal comforts, a Passionate Stocking-Mender. Contrary to cliché and tradition, it is not good cooking for which the genius yearns so much as the comfort of someone sharing with him the menace of daily life; someone who is spiritually at par, always.

I have heard people condemn Daphne du Maurier's biography of her father, with well-known phrases like: "I would rather see my daughter dead at my feet," etc. This type of mind revels in the notion of seeing his daughter dead at his feet. Usually he is a most affectionate parent, but he would rather see his daughter dead at his feet than see her wear slacks, drink a mild whisky and soda, or write his biography after death with the exquisite understanding with which Daphne wrote "Gerald." She remains detached while telling her story (yes, "Gerald" must be a story, it is so inevitable and so heart-breaking; truth is nearly always more complicated). And she allows her moral, for it is indeed a story with a powerful moral, to seep through without interference or comment. She might over and over again have yielded to the temptation of writing as though she had, as it were, a personal stake in the whole tragic business. Pride, perhaps, would not allow this temptation to appear even in conquered form. Her detachment is not wholly released from pity nor tenderness, but she never burdens you with that sense of biographical discomfort as though she were breathing heavily in your face. I can remember no more brilliant description of the difficult half passionate, half impatient relations that exist so often between father and daughter:

There is, alas, a world of difference between the girl of eighteen and the man of fifty, especially when they are father and daughter.

The one is resentful of the other. The girl mocks at experience and detests the voice of authority; the man yearns for companionship and does not know how to attain it . . . They chant about superficialities, and avoid each other's eyes, while all the time they are aware that the moments are passing, and the years will not bring them nearer to one another.

His children were growing up now, and they bewildered him; they were out of his reach in a year, with plans of their own, with friends, with secrets they did not tell. Adolescence was something he had not figured upon; he had not reckoned on that little world of experience that is an imposing barrier between the early and the later 'teens, and the children who had been companions at fourteen were strangers at nineteen . . .*

I wonder if nowadays people read "Peter Ibbetson" or "The Martian," by Daphne du Maurier's grandfather, Gerald's father. In those, our escapist theme is echoed again, for they represent the "aside" life of a man who, happy in his work as one of *Punch's* most popular artists, contented in his family affections, perversely seemed to find nourishment for the soul only in a sort of fourth-dimensional reverie; in a cluster of memories. When reality dragged him away from "dreaming-true" with "Peter Ibbetson," from the not-quite-human fascination which Barty Josselin found in the Martian girl, he would be as melancholy, as adrift as either of his heroes. The salt of life lost its savour for that most tragic of all reasons: no reason whatever.

This morning, September 11, 1940, I read in the papers of a man who, after a week of air-raids over London, had his house shattered by a bomb, and remembered only to save one object of value from the ruins: his alarm-clock, so that he would be roused in time to go to work in the morning. This is reality on a grand scale; or, alternatively, that overworked phrase "not good enough" has lately over and over again met

* From "Gerald," copyright, 1934 and 1935. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc.

its match: for this is at last "good enough." Those of us who are Londoners are feeling for our town now all the tenderness and all the passion of a lover. Men and women of other towns have been roused to the same consciousness for the same fierce reason. Much more has always been written and sung about patriotism for a whole country than for an especial hamlet, village, town or city. Yet that is patriotism reduced to a size which we can handle, our own intimate and beloved Tipperary. In the last war, the soldier yearned, symbolically, over his Tipperary, his Picardy, because his girl was there. Now it is because our town itself is perilously exposed that we are learning in ourselves the world of difference between love couchant and love rampant (literally too, but that is another story of bombs and shelters). Thornton Wilder, the American author and dramatist, wrote a play called "Our Town": a most exquisitely tender play, universal in its symbolism, which yet unluckily could not be translated into terms of "our town" in England without rewriting the whole thing. It was produced without any scenery, as in Shakespeare's time—not for affectation's sake, but so that every American in the vast audience could place it for himself. For the play was simply life as it was lived daily in any small town in the United States. The possessive adjective in the title did the rest, and gave it as a lovely gift to each human being of the thousands who must have seen it during its long run. One of the characters was a stage-manager, a quiet friendly homely little man, but a man of pride for his town; no arrogance, mark you, nor bumptiousness, but the pride which reveals itself in full confidence, without a particle of doubt, that everyone who saw the play cared as much as he did over what was happening every day in Grover's Corners; for it was as surely part of history as the fall of Cæsar, the Battle of Waterloo, or Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg. I believe J. B. Priestley could best have rewritten

"Our Town" with the purely local alterations that would have been necessary to make it English. As it stands, it belongs to that special collection of things written and things seen and things heard, which have a power to bring tears, neither from sentimentality nor for their unearthly beauty, but because, on the contrary, they are peculiarly bound up with earth and not floating away from us like a kite without a string. "Look thy last on all things lovely, every hour" has that feeling. "Journey's End" has it. And Shakespeare's dirge "Fear no more the heat o' the sun." The American author, Scott Fitzgerald, wrote a novel called "Tender Is the Night," which was brimming over with it. There have been campaigns in England and America at various times clamouring for the Wholesome in plays, books and films. "Wholesome" as applied to cereals is an adequate and well-meaning word; we feel it should never be applied to heroines. Yet probably if you asked this school of readers (for there are schools of readers as well as of writers) what they meant by "wholesome" or what they did not like in, for instance, "A Handful of Dust" or "Tender Is the Night," they would reply: "We meet enough unpleasant people in real life. We don't want to meet them in books." You might then argue that "wholesome" people in fiction are probably identical with the "unpleasant" people they complain of in real life; that is, prurient complacent people who have kept reality at arm's length. Beneath the mocking promise of that nightingale title: "Tender Is the Night," you are tilted from enchantment into horror, from horror into wickedness and tragic disintegration, with the inevitability of Greek drama. And you are all the more appalled because this book is *true*; true and wry and bitter:

"See that little stream—we could walk to it in two minutes. It took the British a month to walk to it—a whole empire walking

very slowly, dying in front and pushing forward behind. And another empire walked very slowly backward a few inches a day, leaving the dead like a million bloody rugs.

. . . "This western-front business couldn't be done again, not for a long time. . . . You had to have a whole-souled sentimental equipment going back further than you could remember. You had to remember Christmas, and post-cards of the Crown Prince and his fiancée, and little cafés in Valence and beer gardens in Unter den Linden and weddings at the *mairie*, and going to the Derby, and your grandfather's whiskers. . . . This kind of battle was invented by Lewis Carroll and Jules Verne and whoever wrote 'Undine,' and country deacons bowling and *marraines* in Marseilles and girls seduced in the back lanes of Württemberg and Westphalia. Why, this was a love battle—there was a century of middle-class love spent here. This was the last love battle."

Was it? Not quite, I think.

The end of the first movement of Beethoven's violin concerto in G gives me the same queer feeling of a tenderness so poignant that I can hardly bear it; where the theme, having been once stated and then thwarted and cut off over and over again in confusion and brilliance and battle, is at last released from the *débris* and rises pure and clear, having lost its gaiety but gained its joy in freedom. "Words fail me"—I use the cliché in defiance, because words *do* fail me when I try to express myself on the subject of Butler expressing himself on the subject of Beethoven and this very concerto.

Beethoven's Concerto for violin and orchestra (op. 61) which followed was longer and more tedious still. I have not a single good word for it . . . mere drivelling show stuff.

Yes, my own favourite Butler; which proves that every man must make his own anthology of what he finds most moving and lovely.

Compiling an anthology of one's own is a self-indulgence

belonging to the same delicious category as lazily swimming in clear southern seas on hot afternoons. Every time someone else's new anthology of poetry appears, which is fairly often, I am sulky and rebellious; my soul is heavy with lust to collect an anthology quite different from the other nine hundred and ninety-nine, excelling their excellence. "Anthologise" is a verb which deserves to be in the dictionary. It has been didactically stated that every man can write one story, his own. Equally every man can collect one anthology.

I wonder if my homemade anthology would include my own homemade version of Christina Rossetti's poem, "A Birthday." It always leaves me a little cantankerous unless I happen to read it when I am at the top of my form (which is a time when you never read poetry; you read it when at the bottom of your form). I have found, however, a certain bad-tempered relief in adding a refrain at the end of every second line, in the same irreverent spirit as the well-known discovery that Tennyson's "Oriana" could be made more palatable by changing the refrain "Oriana" to "Bottom-upwards." Here, then, is me being snappish about Christina Rossetti:

My heart is like a singing bird

Whose nest is in a watered shoot

(Mine isn't);

My heart is like an apple-tree

Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit

(Mine isn't);

My heart is like a rainbow shell

That paddles in a balcyon sea

(Mine isn't);

My heart is gladder than all these

Because my love has come to me.

(Yes, but mine hasn't.)

The truth being that we can all sympathise with anyone in trouble, subtracting our own sorrow to make room for his; and we can also genuinely say, "I'm so glad," to a friend whose heart is like a singing bird, if we are even moderately happy ourselves. But to feel a leap of the heart when an eager young thing rushes in entirely wrapped up in her own good news, sublimely unaware that your own is perpetually bad, that is about as easy as to prove "aquiline" the right adjective for a Pekinese.

I shall certainly include no ballads. I am no friend to ballads. They have never brought me that mysterious thrill of other poetry, nor the pleasant nourishment to be drained from fables, legends and fairy tales, though they belong to the same family. Often I have been frivolous but a little irritated by the repetitive strain in most ballads; they do so plug the chorus. "Rendal, my son" never stopped begging his mother to "make my bed soon," and she never stopped asking questions as to what had kept him out so late and whether he had gone again to see that girl: "I never did like her, and as for her cooking— What did she give you for dinner? Eels boiled in broth? *Well!*" "O make my bed soon," begged the poor young man; "For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain would lie doon." Anyhow, why was his bed not made by that time in the evening?

I love all Herrick's lyrics, especially those which are not lauding and berhyming that untidy young woman, Julia. For my own anthology I would choose:

*First I shall hang down my head,
Secondly I shall be dead,
Thirdly, safely buried.*

But then the glorious burst of gratitude which begins "I sing of Brooks, of Blossoms, Birds, and Bowers":

*I sing of Dews, of Rains, and piece by piece
Of Balm, of Oil, of Spice, and Amber-Greece.
I sing of Times trans-shifting; and I write
How Roses first came Red, and Lilies White.*

"Amber-Greece," spelt thus, looks oddly different from the "ambergris" in the dictionary. *Ambre gris*, grey amber, apparently derives from the Arabic "anbar." My own great-grandfather was an amber merchant who lived in Danzig on the shores of the Baltic, and a small but choice piece of his amber was sent to me, a spontaneous gift in return for the Matriarch Chronicles, by an unknown distant member of our family, settled in Chicago. I wish I still had it; but of this, more hereafter. It has too little to do with Herrick or with anthologies.

Flecker's "Old Ships at Tyre," lovely though it is, has been in too many collections. I shall choose, instead, the poet's outburst of rapture just before execution, from "Hassan": "Thy Dawn, O Master of the World, Thy dawn"—I can still hear it spoken by Leon Quartermaine when the play was produced at His Majesty's; I think all of us who were present on that First Night saw dawn in Persia. (Heard in the foyer, on the way out: "That *was* a dud show." "Yes. Worse than Shakespeare.")

Some voices that we have once heard reading poetry never wholly relinquish their claim, nor do we wish them to: the voice of a sturdy woman of Exmoor, the last of the Ridd family, sitting in her cottage on a gale night of darkness and snow, reading us Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi." And the inflexions of Humbert Wolfe reading aloud "The High Song" by lamplight; beside him, a glass of Bordeaux, the colour of soft dark wallflowers, the last of my 1906 Château Haut Brion; I treated poets right in those days, with uplifted eyes

ministering to them as though they were kings. But that attitude, I must confess, went to bits when Mr. Wolfe, fidgeting with the engagement pad on my writing-desk, one of those things you pull in and out and it comes clean each time, like conscience on New Year's Day, pulled it out and wiped out the accumulated notes of what I had to do and whom I had to write to and phone for the next three weeks. Contrite, he rapidly scribbled a poem about white violets and gave it to me, for my forgiveness. (Nothing irrelevant but thinking makes it so?) But for an accident (of which, more hereafter) I would include it now. The missing relevance he only knew, and now it will never be known.

One's first normal reaction on reading an anthology is despairing envy of the anthologist: How much more has this man, this woman, read, than I! From what a rich strange storehouse they draw these random quotations; for of course one never pictures anthologists engaged in any laborious mugging-up, but continually familiar, sprawling and at ease with unexpected and erudite writers, past and present; taking us exploring into strange corners and down queer twisting tunnels; graceful rhymed flattery from Sidney and Spenser; and from any of the assiduous yes-men surrounding Queen Elizabeth. To help me include something of true poetry which is not to be found, I think, in other anthologies, the same friend at Brambleford who gave me for luck the three-penny-bit with Kruger's head on it, last week gave me a small green volume of the Rhythm of Bernard de Morlaix, Monk of Cluny, on the Celestial Country:

*The world is very evil;
The times are waxing late:
Be sober and keep vigil;
The Judge is at the gate:*

*The Judge That comes in mercy,
 The Judge That comes with might,
 To terminate the evil,
 To diadem the right.*

and:

*And the sunlit Land that recks not
 Of tempest nor of fight,
 Shall fold within its bosom
 Each happy Israelite:
 The Home of fadeless splendour,
 Of flowers that fear no thorn,
 Where they shall dwell as children,
 Who here as exiles mourn.
 Midst power that knows no limit,
 And wisdom free from bound,
 The Beatific Vision
 Shall glad the Saints around:
 The peace of all the faithful,
 The calm of all the blest,
 Inviolable, unvaried,
 Divinest, sweetest, best.
 Yes, peace! for war is needless,—
 Yes, calm! for storm is past,—
 And goal from finished labour,
 And anchorage at last.
 That peace—but who may claim it?
 The guileless in their way,
 Who keep the ranks of battle,
 Who mean the thing they say.*

A promise as simple and comforting now as it was in the thirteenth century: "Who mean the thing they say." Words

of one syllable. And (but for one word) so are the last best two lines of "The Silver Swan," which I had forgotten till now:

*The silver swan who living had no note
As death approached, unlocked her silent throat.
Leaning her breast against the reedy shore
Thus sang her first and last, and sang no more:
"Farewell all joys. O death come close mine eyes.
More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise."*

I care especially for "More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise." Rosalind in "As You Like It" said: "I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad." Let us change the remark slightly: "I had rather have a wise man to make me merry than a fool to make me sad." For indeed, fools can make us very sad: fools who take our lightest remark, our wildest statement literally; fools who get drunk and repeat themselves (it is not foolish to drink, but foolish beyond words not to realise that at the other end of drunken alley must be the archway into soberness and an encounter with your friends' opinion of you). Fools are bores—or should one say that bores are fools? But that a wise man can make you merry is undeniable, if he uses his wisdom to speak truth and to speak it ironically or with wit. I once knew a wise man who unfortunately believed that his wisdom and the truth which flashed from his wisdom were matters for his own concern, and when in company he had to be clever and play the fool; thus he obscured his own fitful genius and got himself the reputation of a charlatan. Here was not mere smoke pretending to be fire, but real fire pretending to be smoke; a fire that choked itself with its own smoke. Heine had this wry attitude of posing as a charlatan; of picking up truth

and flinging it away with a laugh; the eternal camouflage of one who says to the world: "How dare you guess I am unhappy!"

The American critic, poet and short-story writer, Dorothy Parker, famous for her demon wit in conversation, writes with an engaging blend of Heine and Br'er Rabbit. Like Heine, she lords it over the art of anticlimax. And like Br'er Rabbit, she seems to have been born in a briar-patch; but the briar-patch gives as good as it gets. She thought, once, that to fall in love would be an awfully big adventure, and discovered it was a damn silly accident, and having discovered it, went and did it again. She is the runaway Scherzo that kicks off from the Slow Movement. She sees the world run by a Practical Joker who once exclaimed: "I've thought of a *really* good one, this time!"—and made Beethoven deaf. Her attitude towards life is perpetual mutiny on the lack of bounty. At the age of four, she took disillusion for her lover, but did not dream of remaining faithful. There is hardly a writer now alive who is her equal at expressing a maximum of pain in a minimum of words. Not only is she aware that Jill must inevitably fall down and break her crown, but she has not really much hope that Jack will come tumbling after, or come after at all.

While reading Dorothy Parker's poems, it struck me that her heroine, not bitter-sweet but bitter-wise, twisted, humorous at her own expense, danger-conscious, willing to yield up everything except the fruits she had won by experience, would make a rueful trio with a lad from Housman and a lad from Heine, one on either side.

A few years ago I reviewed a life of Heine by Antonia Vallentin, in which the sensational parallel with the present situation and outlook in Germany gave one that rather exas-

perated feeling we used to know during the post-last-war period on reading fiction which began something like this: "I fear, I very gravely fear that we do not sufficiently appreciate the far-reaching results of what happened today at Sarajevo. It may easily lead to a European War!"

Here is an extract from one of Heine's letters:

In any case I advise you to be upon your guard. Anything may happen in Germany . . . but you, keep your arms, stand quietly at your post with your musket on your shoulder. I wish you well. And I was really terrified the other day when I heard that your Ministers were intending to disarm France . . .

And again:

German thunder is admittedly German; it is not very agile, and it rumbles a bit slowly; but it will come one day and, when you hear an explosion such as has never yet occurred in the history of the world, then you will know that it is German thunder . . .

The signpost pointing across the fields, "Bridlepath to Pleshey," has been pulled down. So has "Bridlepath to Whitehall," and all the other wooden fingers pointing the way to all the bridlepaths throughout the landscape of England, now dreamlike and uncharted.

Eloquently as Kipling wrote of the joys of "thrashing leagues to leeward of your port, on the coast you've lost the chart of overside," I have always been doubtful as to whether that little accident of letting the chart drop into the heaving seas really did add to the pleasure of the voyage. Nor, later on in the same poem, could I believe him quite sincere when he yearned for the "bucking beam-sea roll of a black Bilbao tramp" manned by a "drunken Dago crew." Poppycock. Kipling was being just boyish over this, as he was not boyish when he wrote: "They shut the road through the woods."

There was once a bridlepath to Pleshey; and still is, only for the present we have to take a risk and find it for ourselves. And if it should be the wrong one and if it should lead us instead to the village of Whitehall—well, that will be pleasant, too.

Last September I had occasion to take a drive through this uncharted England. I was driven in a very comfortable ambulance with glass windows all round so that I need miss nothing of the scenery. It was on about the fifth day of the intensified air attack on London; when my own common sense agreed with doctors, nurses and relations that an invalid was an unnecessary nuisance and responsibility in St. John's Wood just at that period. We were on our way, therefore, to Stratford-on-Avon and the Forest of Arden. "Ay, now am I in Arden," said Touchstone; "the more fool I; when I was at home, I was in a better place." On a more recent cross-country drive I was sitting beside the chauffeur who entertained me with an account of his doings in the War of 1914-1918. I say "entertained" on a surprised note, because I should have thought till then that it would be impossible for any narrative of twenty years back to be so absorbing as to lift my thoughts away from their present heavy preoccupations; yet this man achieved it without any care as to whether he achieved it or not. He just happened to be talking in that pungent racy style, humorous, matter-of-fact, philosophic, sturdy on its rights, which is so characteristic of the English soldier, past and present. When they were shipped from France to Mesopotamia, he said, they had no idea where they were being sent; it might have been Blighty or it might not. It was two years before he saw the white cliffs again, and the hop-fields (for he was a man of Kent). "We was all sorts together out there," he said. "Punjabs, Hindees." And a graphic incident of how, passing and repassing on his errands, he paused several times to

watch a group of Hindus around their cooking-pot, and could not understand why they grew more and more agitated; till presently he was sent for by his officer and put on the mat because apparently each time he had cast his shadow, black in the strong sunlight, over their food, it was made uneatable, and they had to begin all over again with a fresh lot, till their stock of corn was exhausted. "Well, I'm sure I'm very sorry," said a rueful artilleryman, puzzled by the inexorable laws of caste; "but I can't 'elp me shadow, can I?" (No, Green, you cannot help your shadow; none of us can; the greeting still runs: May your shadow never grow less. And Peter Pan, you will remember, tried to restick his with soap!) "And I can't go five miles round, can I?" argued Green, "every time I 'ave to see to my horses." "Can't *eat* it?" Green repeated incredulously. "You wait till they get hungry, they'll eat it fast enough then." I gathered that his officer had been a patient man, for by 1940, when Green told me about it, he had more or less grasped the shadow-conscious point of view of our Hindu allies.

I asked him, as most of us do when we hear Mesopotamia mentioned, whether he had seen anything of the Garden of Eden? "Oh, yes! Slept there one night, we did. Dates and palm-trees. Well, I said, if this is the Garden of Eden, I said, I know of better gardens in Kent, and I only wish I was in one of them now."

(Ay, now am I in Arden. When I was at home, I was in a better place.)

Eden and Arden. We are all banished and homesick at some time of our lives; most of all lately. Garden of Eden, Forest of Arden, Wood of St. John. Our road from St. John's Wood to Stratford led straight back into my childhood: "Look, that's the gate we went through for the Round Pond; that's where the woman with the balloons stood, and the man with

the windmills. There's the Coronet Theatre; we were allowed to go nearly every week. That's the Vienna Bakery; at least, it was; Marie was my best friend at school. They sold the most heavenly— That's Mother's jeweller; it used to be two red-haired men; I believe it's the daughter now. That was our florist; she married Mother's French hairdresser, but they each kept their own shop. We only bought them for dinner parties because there were enough flowers in our own garden, or from a flowerwoman at the corner of Clarendon Road. That's where I was allowed to cross the road alone for the first time—to the Post Office; our house is just round the corner, you can't see it. That's the road running up the hill to St. John's Church. If you go down again on the other side, they've still got the fire-alarm that the Matriarch's daughter had to smash when their house was on fire and she ran out in the cold in her ball-dress and bare shoulders, and two gentlemen came down the hill carrying their skates because it was a very severe winter, and he, the one she fell in love with and never married, helped her smash the glass. Three times round the church and down the hill to Lansdowne Road was the best place for hoops except— No, there, on the other side, the Campden Hill side, that was good for hoops too, after we'd been up through Holland Walk; I liked being able to look through the iron gates and see Holland House; I always wanted to live there. That was the first twopenny Tube; I watched them build it. Look, that used to be my sweet shop; what have they done with it?"—touch of annoyance. "There's where I ran up such a huge bill for pencils and india rubbers and chinks. That's the same grocer who gave us biscuits, squashed flies; 'Garibaldis' was the real name, I wonder why? And there's the square, and there— Oh, *do* look, that's my old school!"

"My old school" is now (or was when I passed a few weeks ago on my way to Stratford) a very smart block of flats; but

had it been bombed, had it been in ruins, I should still have thought, "That's my old school," not "That was the block of flats that was my old school."

We moved swiftly on our way west and out of London. My breathless chronicles stopped, but only for the moment. All the time, nowadays, the past washes up to the present and gets thrown back again, dark waves against the white cliffs; white foam over the dark rocks. We cannot stop ourselves, once the game has started, from marking contrast and resemblances. This village I recognised as being where Rebecca West and I had stayed in September, 1917, after ten days of harvest moon and intensive enemy air-raids over her home beside the Thames estuary. Our move must have been about the same time of year as on this expedition; for the same reason, the same enemy.

And now Wednesday Fortnight had come to us again.

The allusion crystallised into a phrase, during a talk I had had with Robin, two or three years ago. I had accepted by telephone an invitation to do something or other which I did not want to do, or go to some place where I did not want to go; I forget; perhaps for the heaviest kind of dinner-party, or to make a speech, or to declare something open. I had accepted because it was so far ahead that it seemed the path of least resistance to say yes. "Wednesday Fortnight? . . . Yes, all right." And to myself, lightly: "Wednesday Fortnight never comes!" But Tuesday Fortnight came at a fast gallop, and I was seeking sympathy from Robin for tomorrow's ordeal. He gave it in abundance from his magical unending store; for he too had been tricked often and often by the comfortable illusion that Wednesday Fortnight never comes. But we both vowed not to be caught like that again. Wednesday Fortnight *always* comes, said Robin.

It is, in fact, here.

PART THREE

Wednesday Fortnight Always Comes

Part Three

WEDNESDAY FORTNIGHT ALWAYS COMES

AND THIS LESSON on the fallacy of Wednesday Fortnight for ever far away, in a shimmering haze of the future, never drawing any nearer, should have penetrated my understanding at a very early age, for I must have been about eight or nine when I was given a volume of stories, suitable to my years, of which one made a deep impression: "Out of Debt, Out of Danger." A very odd tale, I must say, to be suitable; but it fascinated me, and I returned to it again and again without regard for the moral values (or I should have led a better life thereafter) but enthralled by the sinister plot and characters:

Belle and Lucy were great friends. Belle was dark and bad and extravagant; Lucy, fair and good and thrifty. Belle married a rake, otherwise a profligate, a libertine, a roué, name forgotten. Lucy married Alan, as good, as fair, as thrifty as herself. Very soon these two couples stopped going to each other's parties. Lucy was pained at Belle's; Belle was frankly bored at Lucy's. Belle and her profligate husband plunged into gambling, drink and debt. Oaths and flushed faces and throwing out expensive bow-windows from the sitting-room were as nothing to them. Belle neglected her child shamefully, and ran up reckless bills for gowns and millinery on a more and more shaky credit. In vain Lucy remonstrated with her; she

had only coarse retorts from Belle. (I wonder what they were.) Finally the crash came, during a party, when amidst oaths, gambling, flushed faces and spilt wine, the profligate husband was dragged off to prison, and the bailiffs came in, also the low rascal with a bill for the bow-window, and other low rascals with bills for millinery and gowns. Fair-weather friends at the party did a Timon of Athens and melted quickly away. The servants did the same with only jeers and derision for the weeping Belle who cast herself, bottom upwards, on the couch, and was there succoured by—whom do you think? Yes, indeed. By Lucy, who took her home, washed her face, adopted the child, saw to it that the bills were paid off, and never once said, "I told you so."

Out of debt, out of danger.

Yet optimism is a persuasive wheedling fellow, and there is always a feeling that "perhaps by then" luck will be in. Luck in, luck-in; never luck out in the bright future. But suppose Wednesday Fortnight, now so far away, finds you just as poor as you were when you dashed into the shop and ordered that thing you wanted so much?

I recall almost word for word a casual argument which I had with a friend at the breakfast table a few years ago; myself in the horrid rôle of Lucy, she a lighthearted debonair version of Belle.

"Which do you like best," she asked me, carelessly running through her correspondence, "the sort of polite bill that says, bowing deep and with that sardonic-sinister look about the eyebrows, 'We are sure you have merely overlooked the little matter of our account which has been outstanding since February, 1931,' or the other kind, the rough come-along-you-and-pay kind?"

"Why?"

"Because I'm having both." She scowled heavily at the em-

bossed and Royal-Warranted typewritten letter in her hand.

"I won't be spoken to like that!"

I gathered this was one of the "other kind."

"It's very hard—" I began.

"Darling, you *are* sympathetic."

"—hard on the shopkeepers. If they're courteous, you say they're sardonic; and if they're terse, you 'won't be spoken to like that.' There seems no way in which they can make their reminders acceptable."

Felicity has a strong sense of justice, and she admitted my plea, then swiftly reverted to her own more normal attitude:

"Beasts," she said. "They know perfectly well that it isn't that I've 'merely overlooked the little matter.' I just can't pay. They ought to know I can't."

I was feeling stern and priggish that morning, being myself for once so deliciously near solvency that it could, so to speak, hail me from the shore and see who I was.

"Now look here, Felicity, you can't do wounded-animal-at-bay like this, simply because you bought things and didn't pay for them at the time and can't pay now that the bills have come in. What did you expect?"

She slanted off at an angle: "There was always the chance that something would turn up."

"You don't read Dickens, do you?"

"No," said Micawber's-first-cousin, shaking her fair and remarkably well modelled head. And she went on to reckon forlornly: "This means that I shan't be able to go through Curzon Street any more to get home from my club. There's only Vere Street left, and I'll have to close that up next week with a permanent wave."

"You don't read Dickens, do you?" I repeated.

"No!" This first-cousin-to-Dick-Swiveller was getting a little exasperated by what she deemed my irrelevant flippant-

cies. "I wish you wouldn't keep on about Dickens, when I'm down and out and in the gutter."

"Then, Felicity, my Felicity, suppose you don't have your permanent wave?"

"But I must have it. Look at my hair."

She went back to her packet of grievous correspondence, sifting out this and that bill, demand, first writ and lawyer's letter from others that seemed, by some incalculable process going on in her mind, less injurious. Her lips moved in murmured repetition: "It has possibly escaped your attention that—" "May we venture to remind you—" "As we are now stocktaking, permit us—" "There appears to be an item in our books—" "Our terms are strictly cash, therefore—"

Suddenly came a wild shout of triumph:

"Look! Look! I hadn't noticed. This is a receipt. Oh, the darling! Isn't it a pet? Look at it lying there so good and quiet. A receipt. That was for my *ciré* handbag. You see, I didn't mind paying for that, because I'm still using it."

Now here I had the deepest sympathy for Felicity; genuine sympathy. Here I almost condoned her bad behaviour. However unfair to the shopkeeper, nevertheless one does feel the most bitter resentment at having to pay for something which has long since been used and worn out, or eaten or thrown away or finished up.

"I'm not going to pay for the shagreen blotter I got at Ashford's," exclaimed Felicity, bringing a fresh case to assist my reflections. "It was a present for the Sinclairs before we quarrelled because they said such horrid things about—about one of my friends," she finished carefully, just checking herself on "about you."

Yes, and here was a further aspect of this bill-and-debt matter. One might well hate to pay long afterwards for an

impetuous present given to somebody whom one liked at the time and then completely stopped liking.

Yet I felt I had been understanding enough for the occasion; perhaps a little too understanding. So I benefited her by an austere exposition of ethics, commerce and overhead expenses.

Felicity listened, as good as gold.

"Go on," she begged, "tell me more. I'm loving those winsome little bits about Bills of Lading and the Bank Rate."

"You're taking none of it in the right spirit."

"I am. I am. I'm racked with remorse. I'm a penitent. I'm Jane Shore."

I was startled: "My sweet, do you really know who Jane Shore was?"

"Oh, yes, she was a woman in the Middle Ages who was draped in a white sheet, and so after that everybody gave up wearing them. But really and truly, you know, I'm not so bad. I always pay the small shopkeepers and little dressmakers and tiny cobblers at once, cash down. And they're so sweet and friendly and often confide in me exactly how they're going to spend it; I suppose they feel that, as it's *my* money, it's really very rare, and so it might comfort me to hear just what's being done with it. But these enormous big stores can't possibly need the cash. What's six pounds nine shillings and sixpence to them?"

I practically repeated my recent lecture—ethics and overhead expenses—adding a long corollary as to the Principle of the Thing.

"Yes," Felicity agreed, amiable but absent-minded, making paper boats out of her accounts-rendered. "And then I'll burn them," she babbled on, "and you can always say, after I've shot myself, hounded to death by ruthless tradesmen: 'She burnt her boats; I saw her do it.'"

This was sheer inanity. Nine-tenths of Felicity is honey-combed with wisdom. The tenth part wouldn't even be welcome in a special Home for Cretins.

"How is it," I asked at a tangent, "that all these big places still give you credit? Don't they know about you yet?"

"Well, luckily I stopped buying things at the first two places of all, before they discovered that I was financially a rotten proposition; so I can produce these two names when they say all bland and suspicious with Chinese eyes: 'Can you give us some trade references?' It never occurs to Lovat & Mitchell or Parry's to allow for deterioration in my character."

There may have been something "sardonic-sinister about the brows" as I silently contemplated her. Or even "bland and suspicious with Chinese eyes." For suddenly, stormily, she accused me of direct responsibility:

"If only *writers* stopped rubbing it in, quite good writers, too, that it's one's duty—"

"Writers?"

"Try buying a new hat when you're feeling sad, little girl—"

"Now look here, Felicity, did I ever write that?"

"You'd call it 'psychologically essential for its reaction on the depressed subconscious.' But it weakened my resistance, just the same. Writers ought to *think* before they write things to weaken people's resistances."

To change the subject, I treated her to a spirited précis of "Out of Debt, Out of Danger," and the lesson it had taught me.

Here is a list of what might loosely be called lessons that, against my will, I have learnt about life:

Never reckon on a nervous breakdown to make you more popular. Popularity depends not so much on charm as is

usually believed, nor on goodness (as is usually hoped) but on vitality. Anybody with infectious vitality keeps open house, metaphorically speaking; for people will come and help themselves, scoop up what they want, and try to take it home in a bag, under the illusion that you will never miss it. It is this quality of vitality which creates what used to be called variously the "favourite of the school," "the belle of the ball," "the toast of the Mess," "the idol of the Fifty-first." Most of us have a secret longing to be the popular centre of a group forever dashing in and out of the house unannounced, shouting up at our windows and outside our door: "*Do come along! It's no fun without you!*" No prescription can be given for being that sort of person with that sort of doorstep and that sort of windows.

It's no fun without you: there is the crux of it. Comus at the head of his rabble herd. This ignoble desire to be Comus has been corroborated to me, in confidence, by others, and I have been surprised to find how universal it was. Popularity does not so much mean that everyone loves you and that you are the most charming and irresistible person in the world, but that you possess that particular sort of vitality. Ella Wheeler Wilcox said, "The sad old earth must borrow its mirth," and E. W. Wilcox was often disconcertingly right. It is curious that "it's no fun without you" people are not infrequently drinkers. The reason may be that, being persons with that infectious vitality, they live at the heart of a good time, and so, when a bad time inevitably comes, it is too much of a contrast and they refuse to go through it—unlike the rest of us who doggedly accept the principle that a chicken has to go through a brick wall because it must get to the other side. So they take to drink to supply that vitality artificially, longing once more to see "all faces light up" as they enter a room.

The next lesson: If you are unhappy, and if you are able

to walk, take your unhappiness out-of-doors. This is trite but true. I was warned against bedroom grief when I was very young and intense, by a beautiful music-hall star with auburn hair who was down on her luck because of ill-health.

And the next: Take no notice of the insidious whisper from yourself to yourself: "I'm not in the mood to work." This, of course, only applies to people who are at liberty to fix their own hours of work. But "*I am* in the mood for work" is almost a fantasy, a chimera. Better fix your hours of toil from ten to one every morning, or, if you prefer it, from ten to one every night, but stick to those. If there is no such thing as the mood-to-work, the hours-to-work are the best we can achieve.

I seem to be approaching nearer and nearer to Samuel Smiles on "Self-Help," in my List of Life's Lessons most Unwillingly learnt.

Remember, when sceptical, that poor excuses are almost always true; good ones almost never.

"To know all is to forgive half"; my private version of "Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner," for the French axiom is a beautiful overstatement: however much you may learn in expiation of your friend, to clear up that matter which had roused such savage resentment, you do not forgive all. For if enlightenment explains everything and clears him absolutely, you are too furious with yourself (unless you are a saint) not to be still half angry with him. Yet certainly one would do well to remember, before giving way to those hot bursts of indignation, that there is usually something going on besides black villainy on the further side of the curtain. There is, for instance, often a third person "making mischief"; and if, on hearing this, your rage swivels round to concentrate on that person instead, there, too, he or she may have some reason hidden behind yet another curtain for even wanting to "make mischief." Perhaps, years ago, a fourth

character in the drama, wishing to "make mischief," had told the third person that *you* had been "making mischief." Tout comprendre, c'est la moitié pardonner.

Though fifty per cent of my first impressions turn out to be splendidly right, I have to confess that the other fifty per cent turn out to be wrong; not magnificently wrong but just, in a plain somewhat mortifying monosyllable, "wrong." Even in history. For years in my childhood and early youth I refused to fall a victim to the beauty and sorrows of Mary Queen of Scots, being well on the Elizabeth side, and arguing that Mary exploited her beauty and her sorrows after the manner of Galsworthy's Irene Forsyte. I do not need psychoanalysis to be told that I have a special rage against women who exploit their beauty and their sorrows and get away with it. "It isn't fair," is my hot argument—I suppose, ever so simply, because I feel I have never got away with it myself, though my fury against what "isn't fair" extends well beyond the home region; you can rely on the low ominous growl in my voice as I remark that someone is a Get-Away-with-Murder Girl.

Even if you are fond of history, you pick it up during the school years in a patchwork, depending on whether you are impressed by your history mistress, on how your best friend feels about it, on if you happen to miss a whole reign through illness or other misadventure; and certainly on what story-books are given you haphazard in the years, say, from seven to fourteen. So, knowing little, I condemned Mary Queen of Scots, and particularly the way that credulous and susceptible young noblemen seemed to drop Elizabeth like a hot potato and rush to Mary's side: "It isn't fair!" I could not find a single virtue in Mary, while Elizabeth was gallantry and England, and that rousing speech from a white horse at Tilbury, flouting the impending invasion. But years later I went to

Edinburgh for the first time, and there on the walls of Mary's own apartment I read her letter to her brother-in-law, the King of France, written clearly and delicately on the evening before her head was cut off. . . . I deliberately use four words where one might do, because "execution" does not sound nearly so horrible, and I believe that in Mary's own mind it must have come to her as an axe falling on the back of her neck, slowly or (God grant) quickly cutting off her head. Yet that letter filled me with shame for all my schoolgirl condemnation. Its quiet courage, without any display of gaudiness or drama; the dignity with which she had put away desire to bewail her hard fate, or herself to complain: "It isn't fair." Above all, the thoughtfulness for the future of her ladies and her servants, her generosity in the disposition of what little property remained to her. This was not only a queen writing, it was a brave and well-bred woman; for good behaviour under stress is breeding that has nothing whatever to do with class or rank, and that is another lesson which links itself to knowing and forgiving.

School stories nowadays—I have made careful enquiry into the matter—still retain the same properties essential for a "rattling-good" school story forty years ago, and twenty years ago, and ten. The Most Popular Girl in the Form is indispensable. And the least popular. Other items and properties include the Secret Society with terrific exclusions and banishments; and the Hockey Match (or it might be cricket, tennis or lacrosse) but it will always be the most important match of the year, and always a girl who was to play sprains her ankle and cannot play, and it is usually the quiet, shy unpopular girl who takes her place at the last moment and justifies herself against terrific odds and becomes the School Heroine.

Ingredient number four: the Midnight Feast, subdivided into (a) indoors and (b) out-of-doors by sheets knotted into ropes.

The false accusation of Cheating, which contains another essential motif: Shielding someone else.

The Calm and Noble Headmistress who is always sure that the Wildest Girl in the School, however wild, can be improved by responsibility, and so makes her Head Girl. (In my own junior days, the wildest girl was usually Irish, with blue eyes, black hair and a brogue; research indicates that this is now no longer necessary.)

The Foreign Mistress—reactions vary according to contemporary events. And a mistress with charm, understanding and humour, who inspires the most tiresome attentions and “raves,” with consequent complications in the plot.

Dangerous Adventure. Here, grave discussion reveals two factions: I, personally, plump for dangerous adventures on cliffs. The opposite faction plumps for fires: caught on or in; rescued from.

Now and then, naturally, fresh ingredients are added to the list. Girl Guides have appeared since my time, and then aeroplanes and spies, but I gather to my surprise that the same curious lingo is still in use; a type of old-fashioned slang such as: “She’s not half bad; I vote we admit her to the L.B.M.O. Society.”

These rough notes on school stories are being kept down with an improvised paperweight which looks curiously like a plaster cabbage, and is indeed a plaster cabbage. My young secretary paid sixpence for it in aid of the Social Service Fund when the plaster of her old school hall was being stripped before it was turned into a modern gymnasium. On the last “Saturday Evening” of term, the girls were allowed to knock the plaster decorations off the walls as mementoes: the four

plaster kings' heads cost five shillings each; the cabbages, as I have said, cost only one-tenth of the kings; which is as it should be; high value on our kings; our ships are nowadays our sealing-wax; and it was only Lewis Carroll who attempted to include all these in an equality with a pair of shoes.

I have already mentioned that the ambulance passed my old school premises a week ago, when I was being moved down to the country, out of the worst air-raids. It is now a block of flats, and the school itself was moved some years ago to Ealing, where the portrait of our first Headmistress, by Sargent, still presides over the school hall, as it did in my childhood at Norland Square. I believe that, one of six hundred, I subscribed ten shillings towards it. She retired during my first term. I remember when she appeared in the classroom of the Lower First with another lady wearing a feather boa; she herself in heavy black silk, her hair in a coronet of Victorian plaits, a long gold chain round her neck. She announced: "Girls, this is your new Headmistress." We simpered and shuffled, and our new Headmistress said: "I am sure we shall all be very good friends." I do not know what the hell else she could have said; but at eight years old we were very critical, and we did not consider the feather boa an adequate substitute for the formal gold chain. I realise now, picturing that little scene, that the new Headmistress was intensely shy. How difficult it is for a shy child, or indeed any child, to realise the same shyness in grown-ups! I grew to like her very much. She died shortly after I left school (but not because of it).

I had believed Miss Jones to be a tall and imposing figure, but when I visited her, during my late twenties, I saw that she was tiny. This is a common experience; I have read of it in most memoirs and biographies. The visit was personally conducted on this occasion by Miss Jones's niece. Miss Jones, I

think then over ninety, wished to read one of my books, and her niece asked quite sincerely: "Now, Gladys, which of your books do you think would be suitable for my aunt?" That struck me as a heavenly reversal of affairs, not granted to many of us. As a matter of fact, none of them was suitable. Later, yes, but not then; for I was still at the stage when I enjoyed being daring and modern and almost qualifying for an Expurgated Edition.

"Gladys" is a character whom I remember with detached amusement; little Gladys; dear little Gladys. Dear little Gladys was once sitting sedately with her Shakespeare on the desk in front of her, waiting for her turn to read aloud from "Richard III." Her luck was in; it fell to her to read the speech which the Lady Anne spat at the hunchback Gloucester, containing some frank expressions of contempt such as:

*If ever he have child, abortive be it,
Prodigious, and untimely brought to light,
Whose ugly and unnatural aspect
May fright the hopeful mother at the view.*

"Gladys," thundered the English Literature Mistress, "*what* Shakespeare are you reading from?" (actually ending her sentence on a preposition). There had been no trouble with the rest of the form; they all had their nice little, flat little, expurgated-for-schools edition. But dear little Gladys could pipe up with all the answers: "Please, Miss L., it was my School Prize last year." And indeed it was, presented by the Bishop of London, bound in calf with the gold crest and motto, "Knowledge is now no more a fountain sealed." And there was nothing whatever to be done about it.

I have just consulted that very volume of Shakespeare which goes with me everywhere, to make sure that I was not

romancing, and was delighted still to find the pencil cuts throughout that scene which my embarrassed English Mistress at once insisted should be made.

Another passage of arms on the same subject, the use of improper words, this time between myself and the Botany mistress, still puzzles me when I recall it. Violet had spilt the ink, drenching herself, her exercise-books and everything round her. Too far away to be splashed, and therefore a disinterested onlooker, I exclaimed: "By Jove!" I suppose I was about twelve at the time. Miss G. looked up from her hasty mopping operations: "Who said that? You, Gladys?" She did not comment, but her colour mounted; and presently, on her way back to the staff desk, she put her hand on my shoulder—not unkindly, most writers would say, but I am inclined to dispute that—and said: "I don't know where you picked up such language, but don't bring it into the classroom." By then, I knew something about language: "Damn," of course, would rattle the ceiling down; but there was surely nothing so terrible about "By Jove"? A little pagan, perhaps; no more; even now I am perplexed by her ladylike, Leda-like reaction. Would she have minded as much if I had exclaimed "By Zeus"?

Most girls who moved along with me through the school were called Dorothy, Gladys, Violet, Marjorie, Winifred or Hilda. Those were the contemporary names of the period. This Violet of the ink incident was a vegetarian, my first encounter with what I then thought was an illness. She was a very pretty little girl with a complexion, as any advertisement would say, of milk and roses; it was certainly of milk and lettuce leaves. Her mother and my mother "visited" (with card-cases). My mother could never quite make up her mind whether to approve or disapprove of this vegetarian business; it fascinated me, and I used to pelt Violet with questions: "Haven't you *ever* tasted meat? Don't you *want* to? Don't

you even know what beef and mutton are *like?*” Violet remained tranquil while I thus pestered her. It might have been nice for her to know that nearly forty years later Nemesis was going to dwell with me and be my love for one hundred and six days and nights.

For years I had been getting much too fat without realising that the cause was toxic poisoning from an ovarian cyst. When I was put onto the fasting treatment, I was already dangerously ill with blood-poisoning. Fasting, of course, means citrus fruits, not starvation; modern doctors remind us of Nell Gwyn with their insistent cry of: “Oranges! Oranges!” Oranges, grapefruit, tangerines, blood oranges, even ugli-fruit (they, I gather, are the result of a passionate union between the orange and the grapefruit) were allowed either as juice or, a little later on, in the pulp. And presently a cup of Marmite, very weak, thrown in twice a day—“thrown in” being used figuratively!

My last lunch before I went into the clinic consisted of smoked trout, pheasant and a glass of excellent Alsatian wine. I thought then that my fast would last about three weeks. And three weeks, dear readers, in case any of you are weak mathematicians, is a period of twenty-one days and nights, *not* one hundred and six. Apparently I was to be chastened on a grand scale. Not that I have ever been a large eater, but what my nurse used to call “choosey,” and what I prefer to define as fastidious and appreciative.

That was a delicious smoked trout. Forming a trio with the trout grilled for breakfast, caught in the Rio Grande and handed up to the train at Albuquerque; and the delicious blue trout (blaue Forelle) from a mountain stream at Gastein in the Austrian Tyrol.

There are, I think, two fallacies about fasting: one, that

you are hungry all the time; and the other that, having got over that, and lost hunger, you will never recover it again. Of course I cannot tell how different the experience might have been if I had been in normal good health.

"Look thy last on all things lovely," Walter de la Mare says. I looked my last at kippers for breakfast, and tender rosy steak for lunch, and thumping good dinners; then conscientiously as far as my state of fever and sorrow would permit, I tried to make friends with the citrus fruits. The first to go west, as far as I was concerned, was grapefruit. I may have overdone it at first, believing grapefruit juice bit more sharply on my thirsty throat than orange juice. It is anticipating (but why not?) to say that my liking for grapefruit has not (to date) returned to me. Oranges survived a great deal longer; and when I found I could not bear them either, luckily tangerines were in and case after case of tangerines was brought to my room and emptied as rapidly as authority would allow. I had sobbed for blood-oranges two months too soon; by the time they were in season they did not seem to me any more desirable than their paler brethren. As for the ugly-fruit, it was a delusion that I wanted it at all.

What affected me most was not lack of food and drink, but the strange disappearance of time. Time stretched as an illimitable open space; not the lovely parti-coloured sloping spaces of the Downs, but dreary and flat and a little frightening, like a landscape of cabbages disconsolate after frost. We are tethered to habit more strongly than we realise, Heaven help us; and though humiliating to own that the day loses its shapeliness when undivided by meals, yet when for forty-nine years one has been accustomed to meals at regular times, they act as admirable punctuation; we say, "I'll do it after breakfast," or "Come in for a few minutes before lunch," or "Why, it's dinnertime already; I must stop work." Yes,

we are creatures of habit, and for a long time I failed to adjust myself to a day that offered merely three little decanters of water, grapefruit juice and orange juice, instead of three delicious meals.

Yet—and I cannot repeat this too often, for my own surprise has not worn off—after the first twenty-four or perhaps forty-eight hours, you are not hungry. You desire with the eye, the nose, the imagination, rather than with the seat of hunger. And imagination principally desires nothing sweet. Oh, for the sight of a smoked haddock entering on a tray, that arrogant prow piece made suave with butter! And equally, oh, for sausages crisp and brown, split and burst at one side while the inside curls lusciously out. Oh, for caviare and smoked salmon—in fact, all the hors d'œuvres, all the smörgas I had ever seen ranged on tables at Copenhagen or Stockholm. I repeat that I was not hungry for these delicacies, but I wanted to be allowed to toy with them. A mouthful, I am sure, would have been a mouthful too much. But they took no risks, and I saw no sausages. A cup of Marmite was the most popular feature; not a meal you can get your teeth into, yet at least it smelt savoury and it was not citrus.

In the fullness of time (I refuse to make the obvious joke), when I had been successfully purified, I was slid back onto food as delicately as in our childhood a caterpillar imprisoned in a matchbox is restored to the lettuce leaf. This can be taken literally, for my first meal after that more than Elba-esque one hundred and six days consisted of a raw salad and a cup of vegetable soup of which the chief ingredient was onions. The onion soup was, I think, the result of a conversation between my doctor and myself a few days before, sheer wiliness on my part; I spoke of Hilaire Belloc's essay on the superlative virtues and excel-

lences of an onion; to be found, I think, in a volume called "Hills and the Sea"; I had not read it for about twenty years, but I seemed to remember "I" of the essay meeting a man eating an onion, halfway to Spain, among the Pyrenees. The salad was delicious, too: lettuce, of course; grated carrot coming in a waterfall down one lettuce leaf and grated cheese down the other; beetroot and apple cut into tiny dice, and the more refractory tomato which will neither be grated nor be diced. I ate that first meal with triumphant appetite; but for the next week or two I toyed, and sent back the tempting though still very careful meals allowed me, with less than half of them eaten. "Toying" is what I had done as a child with the spinach; more clearly defined, it means drawing the food slowly round and round your plate, hoping that thus it may mysteriously disappear and delude one's elders. Since then I have become a whale for spinach when it is *épinards à la crème* with the merest touch of nutmeg to flavour it.

Luckily my doctor did not believe in forcing, and I was allowed to be capricious and find my appetite again as Nature dictated. Nature dictated that the next thing I should really enjoy should be large glasses of cold delicious milk. It was odd, because I had not cared about milk for years. Then I suddenly and unexpectedly got voracious, and, having eaten the boiled egg which I had languidly declared was all I could manage for supper, I wanted mushrooms and asparagus. And was given them, though not till the next day. I was allowed, too, an occasional potato baked in its skin, on the fiercely stated condition that I eat every scrap of the skin as well as the potato; as I always do and always would; that first potato went down well, and I left nothing for the pigs. Excellent coffee for breakfast was another heavenly experience of my rebirth. The odd feature of my meals

during the second fortnight was sardines with plenty of olive oil. I had been told during the fasting period that one of the other patients had to his infinite joy and surprise found a sardine in his salad, and I thought it was a mistake. Now I rejoiced, because sardines, you cannot deny it, are both provocative and fascinating.

A slight compensation (besides the loss of three stone in weight) for my restricted menus, was that every flavour now seemed a little clearer than before and more distinct from its next-door flavour. But I could hardly bear to eat anything sweet for months, and therefore clear honey, which was supposed to be good for me, tasted rather nauseating. I was given cheese, eggs, fish, chicken, butter, whole-meal bread, and almost every sort of salad, vegetable and fresh fruit—"in moderation," added Authority. I replied ungratefully and gluttonously with a line of Kipling to the effect that there was still something lost behind the ranges—and frequently mused, during this betwixt-and-between period, on steak and veal and lamb that fell apart at the mere sight of the carving-knife. And on saddle of mutton at Simpson's in the Strand.

Men's sense of privilege is surely more swollen than women's. I have been with at least five men to Simpson's, so famous for sirloin, saddle and Stilton. And not one of my male escorts failed to state didactically that meat in the room where ladies were admitted was *slightly* less superlative than the meat that they always had in the downstairs room for men only. They seemed to find much comfort in the thought. To save myself from developing what I have since heard described as a Freudian "minority complex," I imagined myself escorting a gentleman to a dream Simpson's, where everything was the other way round, explaining to him kindly that though he had better choose saddle, it was not *quite* comparable with the saddle carved in that downstairs Nirvana where Only

Ladies were admitted; and when he asked for fizzy lemonade, how gently would I admonish him: "Yes, fizzy lemonade is nicest with saddle of mutton, but I'm afraid they don't serve it here. We'll have some beer, shall we, in a pretty mug?"

Do I like beer? I do like beer. Golden beer. For further accounts of my enthusiasm for beer, consult the works of Chesterton and Belloc. When I was in New York I learnt that in the sailors' quarter they gave you needle beer, injected with a shot of ether, and I am still wondering why this information thrilled me as it did. It came from a Mr. Disraeli who also gave me a second thrill about undiscovered New York: that at a little theatre in the Italian quarter, full-sized puppets played a version of the Roland legend three hundred and sixty-five times a year. (And suddenly I realised, from his calling Roland "Orlando," that Orlando in "As You Like It" was named after his father, Sir Rowland de Boys.) Photography was Mr. Disraeli's profession, and when they telephoned up to me from the porter's desk in my New York hotel and said: "If you please, ma'am, Mr. Disraeli is waiting to see you," I felt more like Queen Victoria than I have ever felt before or since, and hoped he had brought his own primroses, for I had none to give him.

Did it ever occur to Edward Fitzgerald that the party beneath the bough, the loaf of bread, jug of wine, and so forth, were intended for Omar and nothing was provided for thou? (Did he read much of the Book of Verse? I doubt it.) And is it *jug* or *flask* of wine? I repeat jug, flask, jug, flask, flask, jug, over and over again, trying them on myself till neither means a thing. But why not consult those fourteen copies of the "Khayyam" on my bookshelves? Why not? Because that was thirty-seven years ago and they have melted away like to the summer's rain or to the pearls of morning dew, ne'er to be seen again.

My interest in wine after fasting returned (strangely enough, considering my vinous hobby) only long after my interest in food. I use the word "interest," remembering bitterly how the head-waiter of the hotel in which I was afterwards convalescent asked me with the best intentions in the world: "Would you be interested in lobster, madam?"

I cannot believe he was being deliberately cruel, but his subconscious may have been prompted by that curious herd instinct which puts everyone in league to discourage those of us who struggle towards austerity. I noticed this particularly several years ago when I went on a very strict diet. When you are fasting ("Oranges! Oranges!" cried Nell Gwyn in the pit of Drury Lane) you are usually in a clinic where temptation is out of reach. But dieting is a harder matter; for that runs parallel with your daily life and you are still mixing with your friends, though their meals, unfortunately, are not mixing with you. "Oh, come *on!*" they say. "You're not a bit too fat. I never thought you were."

There are several words for "fat," but "fat" is, on the whole, the best. "Plump" is too like birds to be roasted for the table; "stout" somehow gives an impression of firm finality; if you are stout, you remain stout; the outline will never become an inline. "Obese" is a horrid pretentious attempt to make a bad thing sound not too bad. "Adipose" and "corpulent" are obviously the same thing, only worse. Turning to my thesaurus, and discarding "embonpoint," I suddenly found myself struggling for life and hope among an avalanche of fantastic comparisons, colossal encyclopædic names: giant, Brobdingnagian, Gog and Magog, Gargantua, monster, mammoth; whale, porpoise, behemoth, leviathan, elephant, hippopotamus; thumper, whopper, spanker, strapper; Triton among the minnows—

That's enough; call it "fat."

If you have had a normally good figure, the sort of figure which at a pleasant period of your life French and Viennese dressmakers have called, in congratulatory terms, *une belle fausse-maigre*, and then gradually become too fat, for gland and toxic reasons, for which you were blameless but still unenlightened, the world never ceases to draw attention to the fact that you are obviously an indolent glutton, or, alternatively, a gluttonous sluggard. The assumption is that you only become fat by being reprehensibly idle, and eating and drinking far too much. This, of course, is not true, and we all recognise it when we stop to think. Some of the fattest people we know are, and always have been, small eaters. Some of the slimmest people we know are and always have been ravening wolves when the macaroni and the potatoes and the fresh hot bread come on the table: they whacked the butter onto the bread and the jam onto the butter, and the cream onto the jam, and then perhaps closed it up with some more cream, just to make sure. (This song is unbearably out of date.)

Fat is, as often as not, a matter of legacy, of psychology, of physical wilfulness. But the herd instinct is only compassionate to those who grow too thin, and the herd instinct cannot be checked by reason nor argument. It follows its own course, hallooing triumphantly.

What filled me with surprise was the behaviour of the herd instinct when at last, made painfully aware that you were no longer a *belle fausse-maigre*, that in your case the *fausse* had overwhelmed the *maigre*, you surrendered your final unwillingness—plus your final and, I must admit, your feeble hope that perhaps the miracle could be wrought by prayer—and set out on a long, patient, austere cure of the evil.

You had learnt by then that fat cannot be shed in a day, and that it was dangerous to lose two stone in a fortnight; also, that thyroid or any other gland extract should not be

tossed down your throat in a jolly reckless sort of way, without limit or advice. You were very wise and you were very sad (and when I say you, I mean, of course, me), for three eminent men of letters among your friends had told you—one, I must own, extremely wittily; one fanatically; and one subtly, for he paid you compliments and always cut them short at the neck and then resumed them again round your ankles—that really, if you expected to have any more fun out of life, you had better go and do something drastic about yourself.

Right. Thus encouraged, delicately goaded, sensibly adjured, you selected a doctor. He examined you and prescribed perhaps electric treatment, massage, hot-air baths, a certain amount of the right gland extract, exercise and exercises . . . and, in most cases, rigid diet; no alcohol; periodic fasting. Unlike your lay friends, he sentenced you for a crime which he knew perfectly well you had not committed.

Self-something-or-other, self-knowledge, self-denial, there was your motto. Meanwhile, though you would be rather bored by eating so little and drinking not at all, there were always your friends. They would keep you entertained, they would encourage you, their company would be stimulating, their approval benign; and, after all, though you had appreciated good food and good wines, these were not so integral a part of your life that you could not renounce them for, let us say, six months, to win a creditable silhouette for yourself.

But amazingly, directly you began, the herd instinct did a complete volte-face. It is a capricious beast, that herd instinct. Apparently it could not bear to see you deny yourself. It could not bear it when you refused any sort of rich things, any pastries, anything made with butter, oil or sugar. It turned sentimental. It said: "Oh, but just this once!" It said: "But you haven't eaten a *thing*." It said: "Oh, but there was

nothing in that salad and that bit of fish and those grapes!" It said: "It can't be doing you any good to go on like this." It said: "After all, today is your, my, Tom's, the cat's, the charwoman's, the King's birthday." It said: "I can't bear thin people." It said: "There's nothing that can possibly make you fat in this: only a mixture of cream and rice and butter and salmon and breadcrumbs, under the pastry, and you can leave the crust." It said: "Cook will be so hurt; she made this specially for you." And over and over and over again it said: "Just this *once* can't make a difference."

What, I wonder, is the psychology underlying this form of minor persecution? I should say it began with the maternal instinct, went on to sadism, and ended with outraged hospitality. The sadistic instinct, for some curious twisted subconscious reason, cannot bear to see self-control going on without bringing steady manœuvres, reinforcements and open warfare to break it down. When you do eventually break down, they despise you and you despise yourself and your doctor despises you and nobody is any the better.

Outraged hospitality is the simplest of the trinity allied against you! the nearest to the surface. If your friend has invited you to a meal and you do not eat, the instant assumption is that the fare provided is not sufficiently tempting; it is not succulent; it is perhaps not appropriate to the weather; not hot enough; not cold enough; not enough seasoning; too much seasoning; too rich; too plain; too light; too watery; too foreign; too inexpensive; too horrid . . . "How *could* I have forgotten that you don't like tripe and ortolans in a potato pie?" Hospitality is the kindest of all instincts; but there is pride in it, and pride is unreasonably wounded unless you go away stiff to the throat with food and drink.

Better have stayed at home. No need to have seen your friends again till you were thinner, much thinner. Till you

were thin. They would be nice, then; complimentary; sincerely delighted. There was no real lack of generosity in their natures; just the herd instinct that was against you while the process of dieting was still going on. If you could hold out, your reward would be to look into the mirror and find yourself slim and slender and svelte and slight and spare and supple and sinuous and snaky—no lack of words to express the opposite of fat, and every one of them attractive!—till you were fine-spun, wiry, taper, threadlike; till you were emaciated, lean, meagre, gaunt, macilent, lanky, weedy, skinny, shrivelled, extenuated, tabid—

What *is* tabid?

But my mother would have admitted little difference between "strict dieting" and "fasting": both, to her, meant starvation and death. The maternal instinct is forever obsessed by shadowy unselfish fears that all through your life, unless she sees to it personally, you will be starved. My mother's first impulse, when I visited her, was always to bring forth food. Even if I met her out somewhere, from some mysterious recesses of her handbag, like Mrs. Swiss-Family-Robinson, she was apt to produce half a banana, a broken bar of chocolate and some of those delicious little biscuits, the whole banquet slightly flavoured with acid-drops and peppermint. She was horrified, poor sweet, if I admitted to having gone without nourishment for two whole consecutive hours.

I can hardly remember any autobiography which relates of our early experiences in food and drink, our reactions and discoveries in these, how taste developed and where the sophisticated palate still clung obstinately to its infantile preferences. About three years ago I had to wait at a lonely railway station. I had a penny. I was hungry. There was an automatic machine. Suddenly I remembered how, in my childhood, these

tablets of choc cream had a peculiar dreamlike flavour with which no chocolates from Marquis or Barbellion—chocolate gods in those days—could then compete. (My most lordly uncle, Maximilian Rakonitz, was in the Siege of Paris in 1870 and used to awe me by the laconic statement that he had fed almost entirely on rats and Marquis chocolate.)

"Let's try and see whether I like it still," I thought, confronted with the automatic machine. In went the penny and out came the chocolate. Believe me or not, I liked it as much as ever; that peculiar dreamlike flavour was still there.

I had an aunt living in Hampstead who for me was surrounded by an atmosphere of magic casements and perilous seas forlorn—partly, I am sure, because I went to see her, sitting in the front seat on top (weather permitting) of the old-fashioned horse-omnibus; at one point of the journey a boy rode forward, shouting, out of a public-house at the foot of a hill . . . I can almost swear that he rode through the door of the public-house, and attached himself dashing in front of the two horses, pulled us up the hill, and then clattered away again. My admiration of this act of bravado has, you will say, nothing to do with chocolate cream. But wait: this aunt used to give me chocolate pudding regularly whenever I came, because it was the child's favourite pudding. Nowadays and for the last twenty years I have thought chocolate pudding rather horrid and cloying and thick.

Yes, taste is a queer thing. Cocoanut icing always made me feel sick; like carrying string in your mouth. Caramels were nice; but my favourite food was cheese, and cheese had to be stolen, for authority did not think that large wedges of Gorgonzola were good for delicate, highly strung little Gladys. I would rob the sideboard, whenever I had a chance, of a hunk about the size of my fist and, carrying it away to the nursery or a quiet part of the garden, nibble it in solitude and think

beautiful gauzy thoughts of ladybirds and going on the stage and how nice it was to be good. I stole lumps of sugar, too, from the dining-room sideboard, but more casually, in the spirit of "I might as well, as I am passing"; and absently I used to snatch muscatel grapes from the Salviati glass fruit-dishes, and could never understand why Authority should object to my methods, or, indeed, how they ever found out. I realise now that it did not improve the appearance of that cool golden-green bunch to have seven or eight beheaded stems, and carelessly beheaded at that.

From the kitchen and the larder I stole, like most children, currants, sultanas and raisins. These, in accordance with some mysterious and exciting fiction running in my mind, I mixed in an old earthy flower-pot with mint from the garden, called it "pottage," ate it and pronounced it delicious. It is unlikely that Monsieur Boulestin or any other Lucullus would agree with me over this, or that my own mature judgment would approve it. I have never since then tried mint and earth and currants. Whenever I read of Esau who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, I imagine the mess exactly like mine in the flower-pot.

Biscuits play a most important part in the life of every child epicure. The story is still told of a very special uncle and aunt from far away who were taken upstairs to the nursery to see the little darling at her tea. I must have been about three years old. Ginger-snaps were then a daily treat. It was a hot day. I cannot remember why I was nearly naked; I cannot even remember why I was obliterated, face and eyes and hair, neck and hands, by partially melted ginger-snaps, so that Auntie drew back and decided not to kiss me. I must have been wallowing, simply wallowing; and ginger biscuit on a hot day of summer is not a thing to wallow in.

When I was given biscuits like Maries with a clearly marked

rim, - was impelled always to eat away the rim very, very carefully so as not to go over the edge into the biscuit proper; the same taboo as never walking on the cracks of the pavement, which one invented as a child; perhaps then we were less patient with the dull moments of life than later, and had to supply the extra thrills and terrors for ourselves even out of the milder forms of eating.

Every summer we were sent down, my sister and I, with Nannie and four other little girls with their Nannies, to Broadstairs, where greengages and doughnuts were distributed after bathing, dropped into the sand and fished up again with sandy fingers, and crammed, sand and all, into our hungry mouths. And tasted like heaven. For motives of pure experiment I must one day find a greengage, take it down to Broadstairs, sprinkle it with sand and see how it affects my psyche. Long infantile reveries ought to be the result: reveries about Uncle Mack and his niggers; faint lilt of the songs they had sung, "Down by the Red Blue Sea," "The Giddy Little Girl in the Big Black Hat," "Two Rooms to Let." And nostalgic longings for the old rock steps, uneven and dangerous, that were cut through the cliff itself and were dark and cool and smelt of sea caverns, and light gleaming at the far end through an arch; dry silvery sand and small lumps of white chalk every bit as good as the chalk Father had to buy at home in London and keep in the billiard-room for chalking the cues; but here it was free, free as the shells and starfishes and the long tough ribbons of weed, wet and sticky . . .

I find I can do the nostalgia without the greengage.

Like every other child I have ever met or heard of, I fought the good fight against vegetables. My spinach I flung onto the carpet; my carrots were tossed aside onto the tablecloth; my beans and peas wearily dragged round and round my plate. Father bellowed, and I wept, and nurse or governess or mother

would assert optimistically and with false confidence: "She'll eat it up now! Why, she likes it! She knows it's *lovely*." And so the war went on. There is that about vegetables which the juvenile taste cannot, literally cannot, stomach. And to be honest I am not so set on them now, except what I used to call "sparrowgrass." At all seasons I shouted for "sparrowgrass," and was given cabbage: I asked for bread, and they gave me a stone.

My best friend at school was, by rare intuition on my part, the daughter of the Vienna Bakery, by far the best pastry-cooks for miles round, where all our family and friends bought their *croissants* and *petits fours* and cakes big and little for special occasions. In addition to this terrific advantage over the rest of us in the matter of birth, Marie was also exquisitely pretty and brilliantly clever. Other people used to go and have tea and ices at the Vienna Bakery and have to pay for them: I used to be invited to tea with Marie in the little parlour upstairs where the meal was a sort of Viennese Nights Entertainment. My special favourites were round chocolate and white buns made of a specially succulent pastry and stuffed with cream, called, I think, Krapfen, but we called them Othellos and Desdemonas. I have never tasted such delectable Krapfen anywhere else.

It was a partly foreign household, and wine was a commonplace. They poured us out an inch or two of claret at the bottom of the tumbler and we filled up the rest with water. Mother's favourite tipple was a light claret; I never heard it called Bordeaux until long after I came of age.

Eating counts for a great deal more in the life of children, than drinking. There is really nothing particularly exciting within our range of choice when we are very young: lemonade at parties, ginger-beer if we clamour for it on birthdays and treat days; sherbet; an extra dash of tea in one's milk. When

I was fourteen, my sister got married, and my Uncle Maximilian took the whole party of us to dinner and the theatre in the evening. The play, I remember, was "His Highness My Husband," and treated of the point of view of a Prince Consort. The actor and actress who played the leading parts were called Leonard and Miriam respectively, but I cannot remember their surnames.

At dinner before the play, I tasted champagne for the first time, and pretended it was heaven.

When I was about six, Broadstairs was cold-shouldered for the first time and my parents took us abroad for the holidays, to the Black Forest. During the whole of that holiday they tell me I did something tiresome called "making a fuss about my food." I was a nervous, not a greedy child (one kind is as bad as the other) and nearly always had to be coaxed to eat; but in the Black Forest, when I was six, I announced in sweeping condemnation that I could not and would not eat "foreign messes." It had better be said quickly that I do not agree now with what I felt then on the subject.

The second time I went to the Black Forest, things looked up a bit: I discovered *blaue Forellen*, *Rehbraten* and *Wald Erdbeeren*. The wood strawberries were particularly enchanting, for up to then I had not known that food could grow wild and be picked and eaten without payment or permission. Wood strawberries, wherever we eat them, must always recall the aromatic scent when the sun splashes on to pinewood and moss, the joyful bubbling and tinkle of running water, the tune of Schubert's "Ich hört' ein Bächlein rauschen" . . .

And yet I ought not to have been so surprised and disgusted at foreign cooking; for mostly in our own home we had Austrian cooks, and my aunts and great-aunts of the Rakonitz family used to cook boldly and magnificently with strange exotic undercurrents of flavour and seasoning.

The Black Forest, St. Wolfgang on the Wolfgang See, and Gastein were three places where I looked my first on all things lovely and aromatic. Everywhere the smell of fir-trees and sawn logs stacked in piles on the moss under the pines, their breath husky and clean and resinous; everywhere the crashing waterfalls sent up, as they struck the rock, a little cold mist into the hot day. The broad stream gurgled through the valley and there were trout to be caught in it, and smaller streams leapt or trickled down through the woods from the higher mountains. In the fresh early morning an orchestra in the open Platz played a solemn Chorale, and then some livelier music while you were having breakfast out of doors in your hotel or Gasthaus.

I liked St. Wolfgang least of the three places in this group of which the other two were Rippoldsau and Gastein, because St. Wolfgang is on the rim of a lake, and though any water is better than no water, it is, so to speak, my least favourite water; besides, it rained every day but one during the month we were there. Yet when I remember the discovery that all the woods and mountain slopes were covered with tiny flowers of wild cyclamen, I feel ashamed that that miracle alone was not enough to place St. Wolfgang first instead of last. At St. Wolfgang, also, we discovered something not quite as beautiful as wild cyclamen but almost as surprising, an old man who was the double of the Emperor Francis Joseph. It is likely that every king, emperor and dictator has his double, but this was a strike-me-pink resemblance. He told us with delight how for many years after the old Emperor's death, whenever he went into Ischl, the nearest little town, the people would cheer him loudly, believing in the usual legendary fashion that Francis Joseph was not dead after all. Near St. Wolfgang was the villa belonging to Frau Schratt, herself a legendary figure now, but she was the woman who meant most in the old Em-

peror's life; they say she was the only one who could manage him when he became "difficult," which we are led to believe was most of the time. I had seen pictures of her, a stout comfortable body in a black dress and a large brooch. Ischl is a familiar name in what I call the Rakonitz Chronicles: chronicles of my aunts and great-aunts and uncles and cousins, a family that was naïve and yet worldly—worldly in its proceedings, naïve in its stresses, for I kept on saying to myself while I listened to their descriptions of the past: "Queer, that bit isn't what *we* should think important!"

(God, if one has nostalgia, now, it is not so much for the beauty of those places, which, after all, one has seen for oneself, but for the carefree state of soul in which our ancestors saw them, long before.)

I went to Bad-Gastein for a cure in 1935 after a glorious summer in the South of France: which meant glorious bathing and sunshine—and cooking. Why, therefore, it should suddenly have been discovered, when I came back to England in August, that I was suffering badly from anæmia and low blood-pressure, I cannot understand; had it been diagnosed that I was dying from a surfeit of lampreys (or fresh sardines), it might have sounded more plausible. I was glad, however, not to have missed seeing Gastein; not to have missed the thunder sound as a wagon drives over one of the loose wooden plank bridges spanning the wide stream along the valley; not to have missed the engaging fashion in which heart-shaped holes were punched into the shutters of every little Gasthof; the hopeful way in which Gasthof Erika announce that they have "just only one double bedroom free"; the contented half-phrases heard from the older people promenading together, "Sie sah so nett aus" (which translates as, "She looked so nice") when you are sure that the unknown "she" must have looked bloody awful, to judge from those

who were praising her toilet and appearance. On the way to the café with innumerable little tables hidden among the pines, you pass the inevitable Empress Elizabeth seat with her medallion portrait inset. All my memories of this lady are linked with childish days and the sitting-room in our house at Holland Park; for my mother was endlessly telling me stories about her beauty and her daring and her prowess on horseback and her long chestnut hair down to her feet. All the Rakonitzes had wonderful hair, themselves; hair fascinated them; certainly none of them could have been Delilah in a previous incarnation, or Samson's locks would have been spared in a last moment of compassion and so the pillars of Gaza left standing. By a queer slip in memory, I have forgotten the name and the face and even the identity of the man who told me that in his youth he had been the very student to chase the mad assassin who had stabbed Empress Elizabeth at Geneva, and made him drop his weapon clattering onto the cobbles.

My masseuse in Gastein was a stout old peasant who had never even been as far from her native village as Salzburg; her talk was on the universal note which I had heard from peasant women in England and Scotland, America, France and Italy: that is, she wished only for peace, and sighed at the prospect that one day there might be more war brought on by men whom she could not control. She was resigned to the fact that she could not control her loved son whom she perpetually referred to as a "Narr," so that I wondered if he were just the village idiot or a Shakespearean fool, full of wise saws and modern instances? She had paid me several visits before I discovered that he was no candidate for the loony-bin (has Wodehouse reached the high stage where one need not any more quote loony-bin in inverted commas?). By a brilliant flash of translation, following complete bewilderment, I

worked out from what my masseuse told me that her son was no "Narr"; he was, I think, an Adventist; he would not work on Saturdays, and would not eat meat, and would not kill if there was a war. Of this last item she herself approved. Over not eating meat she was tolerant: he could do and think what he liked if *only* he would work on Saturdays like other men, and so hold down a job. She always came back to that. One realised how many battles had been in their home on that lone issue; stupid bitter fighting between a peasant mother and son who adored each other; I could hear the echoes of it in her voice as she rubbed me again and went on with her argument: "For after all, the dear Christus spoke so many years ago, and who can judge any more what is Saturday and what is Sunday?" She fetched her own mother right from the other end of the valley to come and repeat to him this very thing, but he only said: "What does that old woman know about it?" (It was from this that I began to have a faint suspicion that my masseuse could not have been more than two or three years older than myself, whereas I had imagined her a ripe seventy.) "My son's wife," she continued, a mother-in-law growl in her voice, "his wife is the same as he is, or she might bring him to see sense; but she adores him; she, too, is a Narr, or would be if she were a man . . ."

I pondered on this point of view about men, while my masseuse went on to inform me that there were seven "Narren" in Gastein; a fairly large proportion. One of them was a master-cobbler who forced his apprentice, who was not allowed to work on Saturdays, to work on Sundays instead: "And there I say that is not right, it is never right, to use force over what others choose to believe; and so often I tell my son, but he is a *fool*"—always with the same cadence of tenderness and exasperation.

It was not my place to point out to the peasant woman of

Gastein how lopsided was her logic; how like an ill-balanced seesaw. She believed that her son was out of his mind, and so were the other six fools in Gastein; yet in her own mind she too longed for peace in her time, and for a little prosperity that can only spring from peace and permanence.

Permanence? But one could tell the story of one's life simply by remembering moments at railways stations.

I wrote an essay on this idea four years ago, when I was trying to find a formula for autobiography more satisfactory than "Charles-my-friend." I read it through again more recently, in September, 1940, when in nearly every wireless news-bulletin the phrase occurred, "The R.A.F. bombed the railway junction at . . ." and then a string of foreign names like the names of places in hell, as far away and as near; it suddenly seems to me touching that any essay could feel so literally out of date. Here it is:

From the Grand Central I started, aged forty, on my first bewildered apprehensive trip to Hollywood. No wonder I was apprehensive: the entrance hall was such a lordly palace, and the platform by which the train stood, so dark and cramped; and anything might happen to you four days' journey away among unfamiliar stars and celluloid.

At Euston, aged twenty-two, I was madly in love; at Basel, in the station restaurant, aged six and on my first journey abroad, I drowsily carved my way through a large Wiener Schnitzel, murmured a longing for a static existence and vowed myself to a life of no more travelling ever again. At Glasgow, in the very vortex of the station I discovered a little house; at Pasadena I saw two Film Mommas waddling along with orthodox silver hair, their bosoms decorated with orthodox orchids; at Albuquerque, I first saw Indians; and at Pontarlier

I heard the guns in 1914 which announced that France and Germany were at war. A few months ago I stood just outside Philadelphia station, stranded there at the strange bleak hour of two A.M. and saw a thin girl waiting and shivering beside me, till suddenly a large yellow Hispano shot in, picked her up and bore her off, leaving me there alone, jealous and cold.

At St. Raphael, on the Riviera, in a wild deluge of rain, Prunella came rushing down the platform to meet us, with the speed and élan of a young Valkyrie, an embodiment of contradictory clothes for all climates; a modern poster girl, bare-headed with scarlet lips, scarlet trousers, rope-soled espadrilles, a blue singlet, and a cloak of cowboy grey fur snatched up carelessly at the last moment for warmth, streaming backwards in the wind and the rain.

At Brockenhurst in the New Forest, you smell the pines and moss even before you have opened your train carriage door, and you know that in a moment there will be heather and little galloping forest ponies.

The little road beyond the station at Diano Marina in Italy was bright with small stiff orange trees in fruit, and there we stood tense and vigilant, with the whole station staff and all the other passengers gathered round us and a distant view of the road that wound down in spirals from our villa on the hill, for the train was due in three minutes and one of our party had forgotten his passport; but the gay picturesque old cab driver with his two bony horses had volunteered to drive back for it and bring it to us in time. We were able to watch breathlessly every inch of his optimistic progress up the hill and down again. He just shot across the level crossing in time before the gates came down. Then as he gallantly waved the passport in the air while he urged his horses to a yet more frenzied pace, our sympathizers burst into a ringing cheer. We were ourselves past cheering, for here was the rumble of

the express and we still remained in suspense as to which would win the race. So much human interest, such genuine participation in our agony, such joy in our ultimate relief, was typical of the Latin race.

And at Adlestrop— I have never been at Adlestrop, so how should I know anything of the station? I have never been, but I have been a hundred times, for Edward Thomas, the poet, wrote about it one of the most beautiful poems that have ever been inspired merely by a lazy train drawing up at a little sleepy halt while the moments drawled by, birds sang, and nobody cared what time it was.

I did not visit Vienna until I was thirty-two, though I had dwelt there spiritually since my Viennese great-aunt, the Matriarch, first played me "The Blue Danube" nearly forty years ago. Directly I arrived at this magical city the porter whom I had tipped ran after the taxi to return half my tip, protesting with a charming smile that it was too much, and that the Gnädige Frau did not yet understand the exchange. So that old legend of Viennese charm was true, proved incredibly true even before you left the station. On my way back to England, the no less charming wagon-lit *contrôleur* told me a merry tale of an Englishman who had done this trip with them so often and had so endeared himself to the staff of the Orient Express that they decided on his next trip to combine and give him a concert in the dining-car after closing hours. All through the night they warbled at the Herr Engländer: student songs, waltz songs, drinking songs, classical lieder . . . It had been a great success, my wagon-lit attendant assured me, and they deeply regretted that for reasons unknown, the Herr Engländer never travelled that way again.

Yes, a procession of stations, a pageant of trains, a kaleidoscope of emotions: dozens of little mountain halts in Central

Europe that were no more than the shape of a chalet added to the music of a waterfall; dozens of little Mediterranean halts that were no more than the shape of a palm added to a line of brilliant blue sea; dozens of little desert halts that were no more than dark blue night, a dim archway, one glowing lamp and the silhouette of an Indian. These all conform to type, but falling in love at Euston is more incongruous. Yet they say that under Euston is a flourishing pig farm; and, with that strange fairy tale, glamour becomes once more possible. For if under our very feet, just here, through these sham-impressive portals and beneath those gloomy vaulted roofs, just here where the luggage gets weighed and a truck full of massive trunks labelled "For Scotland" gets wheeled into my flanks, and a child begs in vain for a penny to put into the automatic slot, if just here where I stamp my foot and the echoes clang in the hollow air, if underneath there is a jolly little farm suspected by none save the initiate, and jolly little pigs with curly tails go running about squeaking, then why should we not have used Euston Station for our romantic trysts, Tom and I?

I lived then about an hour away from Euston, in the country. Tom was working in London. My father did not approve of Tom. Nothing, you see, could have been more conventional. And if I was a few years older than Juliet Capulet at the time when she and young Montague met, that proved only that Juliet was too young to come out and look for trouble, and I, as far as I can remember, was just about the ripe age for it. Because my father declared that Tom was "unstable" (just like old Capulet—and, indeed, Romeo *was* a little unstable), I could only steal enough time to travel up to Euston where Tom would meet me and we would spend about ten minutes wandering from platform to platform in the mists of glamour and the fogs of North London, and then he

would escort me straightway back again by train and say goodbye to me at a little station that was not unlike Adlestrop. It was he, indeed, who told me about the pig farm, and maybe he was telling the truth. Anyhow, it was part of the enchantment.

I have not seen Tom now for twenty-five years, but rumour, still adding slight touches of the fantastic, has declared him to be enthroned at Carlisle, which in my schooldays was associated with Lord Macaulay and Armada beacons: "And the red glare on Skiddaw roused the burghers of Carlisle." Now, no less exultantly, it is the headquarters of the Central Control of the Liquor Traffic. Just try rolling it out on your tongue: "Central Control of the Liquor Traffic." It is all I can do, when I pass through Carlisle by train or by car, going North, not to imagine that I see Tom proudly enthroned on a huge barrel, vine leaves in his hair (as Hedda Gabler would have it) and with one extended hand imperiously controlling the uncontrollable Liquor Traffic.

But perhaps I have still not made it quite clear, yet, how it was that I found a house in the middle of the station at Glasgow. We were on our way back from Skye, that wild and lovely island, and we stayed overnight to see the Glasgow picture-gallery. I am a little inclined to mix up these pictures with the picture-gallery at Edinburgh, which is probably a crime punishable by death. I believe the first three were in Edinburgh, the rest in Glasgow: Avercamp's "Winter Scene," with tiny figures skating on a frost-bound snowy canal; Frans Hals's "Verdonck" (which means Topper), a fellow with a preternaturally strong jawbone and lewd merry crinkled eyes; and a lovely serious Gainsborough girl in a pearl-grey picture hat. Rembrandt's glorious dusky "Man in the Golden Helmet," and Tiepolo's "Finding of Moses," where the tall delicate eighteenth century princess, daughter of Pharaoh, comes

down to the ornamental water's edge in her stiffly brocaded eighteenth century garments, followed by a laughing cluster of Italian handmaidens and by her greyhound, her page, her dwarf-bulrushes thrilling beneath the touch of her exquisite little pointed shoe, and Moses howling fit to bust himself. And next we discovered a Greuze unlike any other Greuze; for the child he painted here was not plump and prettily wistful as a cooing dove: it was a child of character, a schoolgirl thin and angular and plain, her hair brushed back from her forehead with hard uncompromising strokes; a schoolgirl sighing wearily over her task; a schoolgirl with the loveliest hands, hands that were worth all the rest of Greuze put together.

This, however, has nothing to do with stations; yet there, in the middle of Glasgow station where the platforms swerved aside and met again, and the trains stood roaring and puffing and hissing in a businesslike way ready to be off, with the booking-office only a few yards away and porters dashing to and fro brutally intent on their luggage-trucks and heedless of human life, here, set valiantly in the very centre of this commotion, stood a quiet little brown and green house, very much in the style of the gingerbread House in the Woods that had once been so fatally tempting to Hansel and Gretel. In fact, so flabbergasted was I at this irrelevant encounter that I could hardly have been more surprised had the lady who was tranquilly standing at the door, broken into one of Humperdinck's goblin melodies. All that she actually said, however, was Scottishly: "You are invited to make a tourr of inspection. Strraight in by this door, please, and upstairs and out again by the other door." Then, and then only, did I get the idea; and indeed it was not a bad place for a Show House; something fresh to do while waiting for your train to come in; the little Ideal Home was filled by an excited chatter mostly from young couples exclaiming over every doormat,

over the fawn and cream-coloured scheme, the demure cream walls, the sedate bleached oak of the furniture; already imagining themselves, no doubt, married and installed in the green and beige decorum of the best bedroom. "If we could only afford to settle, I'd like it to be just like this," I heard one of them sigh: a dumpy girl of the style that would have no thoughts beyond "settling"; the Wendy type, the Maggie type. But the young man escorting her was lean and dark, with frowning eyes the colour of rain-water. He was standing at the window while she spoke; she was sitting on the bed—everybody's bed, nobody's bed; and I saw him glance out, a swift furtive discontented look. What a strange landscape from the window of that snug little home: nothing but trains, trains just leaving, trains gathering up their loins, piston-rods feverishly working, smoke and roar and escape! If she had her wish and if he did not have his, next time he looked out of a similar window he would not see trains going south and east, he would see other little houses and neat patches of garden. But he was the roaming type, haunted by that demon Wanderlust, and I think he preferred the trains. I think he would have preferred his house set down like this one, bang in the middle of tumult and travel and the piston-rods feverishly working.

When I was a child, all my family and friends were very much richer than they were to be in a few years' time; and yet, not thrifty over other things, over houses, servants or carriages, when it came to travelling they went with the most Spartan economy. Was that typical, I wonder, of a whole generation? Stations, then, were places where one had to be a long time beforehand in order to "get a good seat"; sometimes, even, to get a seat at all. When a train was sighted round the bend, a vibration of fear went through the crowd that

watched for it, fear of the timid (I was one of the timid) for the fate of these adventurers who swung themselves on to the footboard before the train stopped. How is it that my parents never thought of booking seats beforehand? booking a compartment? booking berths on the train? However far we travelled, we sat upright through the night; or if we were lucky, stretched our cramped limbs along one side of the carriage in turn with the strangers who shared with us.

By the time we arrived at Basel station, when I was six and going abroad for the first time, I was utterly worn out; and my elder sister kept on comforting me with the slogan "Hot bouillon and feather beds," which in time turned to a sleepy confusion of hot beds and feather bouillon. Whichever way, they sounded far off as Paradise. Foreigners were horrid, foreigners jabbered, I declared, small and intolerant; and I wished and wished, more forlornly hating "abroad" every moment, that we had been left as usual to travel with Nannie to that little seaside place called Broadstairs, only two hours away from our own home in London, so that we arrived in broad daylight at a country station with a blaze of nasturtiums in the station-master's flower-beds, the fresh sharp smell and glitters of the sea down the hill, the broken shells of the station yard, that crunched into gravel beneath our feet. That was the sort of station for me! No more Abroad for me! Thus I made my vows, and broke them, and eighteen years later ate cherry jam at Pontarlier, while the guns thundered and little French poilus in red and blue leapt into the waiting trains.

We were in German Switzerland in July, 1914, when the rumours of war began to flow in, and all the guides and waiters and lift-men were called away from their jobs, and foreigners were told that they had better leave their luggage and get home quick. Nobody knew what nations were going to war, and what nations had already declared war: and the

Balkan visitors in the hotel kept on receiving enormous musical comedy dispatches, and they clutched their foreheads and rushed out and were not seen again.

We all bundled into a train somehow, going somewhere; and because we were a bit overwrought, it did not seem at all funny, then, that my mother should turn round and say with stinging reproof to a suitcase that stood in her way: "You might have a little consideration!"

When, after a nightmare of travelling, we reached Pontarlier, the frontier station between France and Switzerland, a great roar of guns went up, and we were told that this was to announce that France had at that moment declared war. All the passengers were then hustled out of the trains, and hundreds of quick little soldiers in blue and red uniforms leapt on instead, and the trains went off, and we were left stranded at Pontarlier station. We were ravenously hungry and had no hope of getting any food. However, we strayed into the station waiting-room—and there a miracle had happened. We rubbed our eyes and simply could not believe it: not a soul was there to receive us, but long tables were covered with snowy tablecloths, and places were laid for tea, and tea was all ready—the sort of wholesome tea which cook provided when we gave a party in the nursery as children; everything was very neat and shining, and above all, the whole way down each table was dish after dish of beautiful cherry jam, scarlet gleaming cherry jam, the best jam I have ever eaten.

The railway station at Paris, when at last we arrived, was chaos wedded to Bedlam, incoherence to hysteria, triumph to panic. All the porters simply stood on trucks screaming, "À Berlin!" Taxi-drivers felt the same way about it; so we struggled through the raving crowds, carrying our own handbags or abandoning them. Conscripts who had poured into Paris from all parts of the country had flung themselves down to

sleep all over the platforms, tired heads pillowed on their bundles. The once gay intimate pastures of our favourite Gare de Lyon might have been already a battlefield seen blurred and unfamiliar as in a nightmare. It was two A.M., and we had had no food since the "thé complet" with cherry jam at Pontarlier. Eventually we were grudgingly served with some stale poached eggs in a brasserie, presently invaded by a band of noisy raiders: "Soyez sages, mes enfants! La France a besoin de vous," said the woman behind the counter, looking for the moment as inspired as St. Joan. They obeyed her stern gesture and slunk away. Placards flapping from the walls bade the people, with a variety of fanatical inflexions, to avenge Jaurès, who had just been murdered. In a small cheap hotel close by, we were allowed to bed for a few hours on the boarded floor of the *salle à manger*; the windows were closed and the *chauffage* full on. A thunderstorm hotly competed with the sound of gun-carriages rumbling over the cobbled street outside. In the morning we went to the Gare du Nord. So did forty thousand others. The gates were closed and the crowds were abruptly informed that trains and station that day were only for military use. Still we waited, packed and jammed together, hoping. Suddenly a porter appeared from nowhere, irrelevant and divine as the cherry jam; he touched one of our party on the arm and bade us follow him. We followed him through the crowd, into the station by a side entrance, safely past the scrutiny of suspicious Gallic officials (I suspect our porter of having been the God Mercury, rather cleverly disguised), onto a platform and into a train. This train presently took us to Calais. After a seasick interlude, we were presently in England, and presently we were at Victoria, which seemed now, in the warm sweet light of contrast, to be tranquil, drowsy and unhurried by events; a very *Adlestrop* among stations:

*Yes, I remember Adlestrop—
The name—because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June. . . .*

*And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry;
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.*

Yes, this essay is a *little* out-of-date, no doubt of it. All down the margins I have pencilled the word "Now," and a question-mark. I suppose my idea was to make a few crisp comments on the changes between then and now; I might have intended to say, for instance, that eating delicious veal cutlets at Basel might no longer be a restful occupation; that the station-masters at St. Raphaël on the French Riviera and Diano Marina on the Italian Riviera might not welcome me and my luggage with the warmth and intimacy of old days. Nor can I tell, without paying a visit to Adlestrop, whether it is still as Edward Thomas saw it—

*The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name—*

or whether, on the contrary, it might be now England's nameless but busiest junction for the troops? The legend of a flourishing pig farm under Euston station, if it were true, would now be a flourishing shelter which we ourselves shared with our future bacon. As for Macaulay's burghers of Carlisle, how superior I was, when I wrote this essay, with my "Now"!

... Now, I must have meant, now in these weak piping times of peace, Carlisle is the headquarters of the Liquor Traffic. Broadstairs station I should indeed love to revisit and hear the broken seashells of the station crunch into gravel beneath my feet; and, directly the advice "Prohibited area" is removed from the southeast coast, I shall do so, for I am pining "as one who sits ashore and longs perchance to visit dolphin-coral in deep seas." That little home in the middle of Glasgow station—would it still be there, I wonder? "My dear Mary, I am staying comfortably here for the present. Do write. My address is Mon Repos (or Mon Abris), Railway Station, Glasgow. Yours, Gladys."

It is a salutary lesson to think how few years have passed since I wrote that essay and thought myself up to date. And am I any more up to date, now? The word "now" has itself gone fluid; it simply refuses to remain stationary. "Now" is when I wrote this essay; "now" is also now when I am re-reading it with rueful comment on the shocks and changes which "now" has suffered since then. But "now" may be equally a few months hence when you are reading it and when my own "now" will again be out of date. There is nothing to be done about "now" except let it rip. The chronological advantages of writing this sort of book in diary form, the date attached to each entry, become so obvious that I need not dwell on them. I even pondered on the possibility of rewriting the whole volume in proper sequence. We used to dawdle towards our dates until they were out of date, then old-fashioned, then historical or mediæval. Today one is out of date with the very whistle of the word through the air. And no proverb is more out of date than "Here today and gone tomorrow," which once allowed us up to twenty-four hours for the future to become the past. How grateful we are, in the geographically cramped present, for foreign travel in the

past, now that the whole situation expresses itself most easily in the nonsense rhymes of Lewis Carroll:

*The further off from England the nearer is to France
Then turn not pale, beloved snail, but come and join the
dance.*

(For "snail," fill in according to latest diplomatic events.)

There are two schools of thought as regards the ascent and descent of a hill unspecified in the simple nursery couplet:

*The King of France went up the hill with twice ten thousand
men,
The King of France came down again, and ne'er went up
again.*

Or:

*The Noble Duke of York, he had ten thousand men,
He marched them up to the top of the hill, and he marched
them down again.*

A policeman at the Duke of York steps in Whitehall informed me this was the same Duke of York who did that well-accompanied mountaineering feat; but I have never heard which King of France went up and down which hill? Some industrious research would have enabled me to verify and amplify the various points of similarity and difference in the two versions. Even superficially, however, it must strike us at once that the King of France, though he had double the number of men, was easier put off, so to speak, than the Duke of York. If the story were to be filmed, it would involve buying both versions. It is more suitable for the films than for the

stage; twice ten thousand men, or even once, is rather a large cast unless it be done as in the old days at His Majesty's Theatre, with a small company of men marching proudly round and round, as well as up and down. To judge by these nursery rhymes, and from other indications, too, royalty in the old days used to go about with the most cumbersome retinue; not necessarily either for safety or for conversation, but I suppose just because they liked the feeling. I always thought that King Lear made a grave mistake in giving up his throne and going to live simply with his daughters in their little country-houses; but, having once committed this psychological error, I had a faint sympathy with Regan and Goneril when they questioned the necessity of a hundred knights to hang about and eat their heads off.

Compare the display and pageantry of these royal retinues with the strange drama of Queen Wilhelmina's almost solitary embarkation for England when from the terrible losses of the Netherlands Army it had become clear that their resistance was for the time almost at an end. An English naval officer told how he saw her walking down the quay towards him. At first he did not realise that it was the Queen, for she walked alone, followed at a little distance by two or three of her household: not a hundred; nor ten thousand; nor twice ten thousand.

"Can you take me to England?" she said.

A tale is told of a certain dim engraving which for years was held to be Byron landing at Missolonghi, but actually turned out to be Queen Victoria landing at Boulogne. (Lord Byron of the two would have been more annoyed at the error. Or wouldn't he?)

The anecdote, when I first heard it, made me feel "strangely happy, she knew not why"—as novelists used to say of first

love. It was between two crises, I believe; and about eight of us were sitting on the terrace of a house in the country during that almost extinct custom called the English week-end. Why, we all wondered, was Anybody Landing Anywhere held by painters to be such a good subject at that period, better even than Anybody Embarking Anywhere? Empress Eugénie, for instance, is shown by Boudin constantly landing on piers and jetties. One of the company suggested fatuously that it was because more people Landed than Embarked; and I had to prove to her that they were bound to be mathematically equal; unless of course, like Hiawatha, they embarked in a canoe and sailed into the sunset and never landed anywhere; or (I went on, trying to be impressive and to show off my love of Malory) when King Arthur was dying and a queen with three barges came towards him across the water—I did not realise why I was interrupted by a shout of laughter, till an irreverent friend remarked that three barges was not a bad dowry for one queen.

There is a Poltergeist who swiftly and efficiently throws down a banana skin to trip us up, whenever we try to be most impressive. When I was lecturing in America in 1936 I was particularly anxious, at Smith College, not to betray my lack of real scholastic attainment. The students formed a delightfully quick and appreciative audience; encouraged by this, and by a whisper from the Dean, just before we started, that unfortunately the President of the College could not be present but sent his deepest regrets, I introduced a disquisition on a theory of my own about an aspect of Shakespeare which seemed to me sound from the psychological angle, though I had always been too idle or perhaps too busy to establish it firmly and accurately by research. Why did Shakespeare, I asked, over and over again show us a father in the wrong and a daughter in the right? a hot-tempered, violent, unreason-

able father, and a gentle girl, the victim of his temper and unreason, forgiving him at the end if she were allowed to do so? As examples, I quoted Lear and Cordelia, Capulet and Juliet, Shylock and Jessica, Leonato and Hero, Brabantio and Desdemona, Prospero and Miranda, Cymbeline and Imogen, Leontes and Perdita. This is surely a longer crocodile procession than could be discovered, in the plays, of a reverse situation: fathers in the right and daughters in the wrong. It was indeed extraordinary with what ease Brabantio and Leonato accepted the word of any casual stranger who came along and threw doubt on their daughter's virtue. Jessica I have always thought a bit smug and discontented, but she had not had a very good time at home, especially since her father had been irritated by that pair of cool insulting Anglo-Indians, Antonio and Bassanio. Mothers hardly came into it at all. The situation (the Greeks might have said that Freud had a word for it) arose almost entirely between fathers and daughters. Therefore I conjectured that Shakespeare himself was suffering from a guilt complex for having deserted his own daughter, Susanna, and worked it off by these numerous plots vilifying himself as the father, and sublimating the daughter. Judith and Hamnet were born only after he left home, so where they were concerned, his subconscious may not have been in the same state of stew.

By the time he reached "The Tempest," the last of his plays before he retired to a peaceful life at Stratford, he was feeling much better, and one cannot be at all sure but he meant Prospero to appear as the best of fathers. (Even at Smith College, where my opinions were treated so leniently, I thought it best to hide what I really thought of Prospero.)

When my lecture was over, the Dean, congratulating me, remarked: "And I was so glad to see that, after all, our President slipped in just before you began. You know, he's one of

our greatest Shakespearean authorities. He'll be joining us at supper. I'm sure you'll enjoy talking to him." A long-drawn-out "Coo!" was my only reply; at least, it was my soul's reply. One of the greatest Shakespearean authorities—and I who had been gaily pouring out my stuff, based only on psychology and instinct; I to whom the words "research" and "verify" were strangers.

It was nice to think I was going to meet him at supper presently.

As a matter of fact, President Neilson was charming; and he said, I think truthfully, how interested he had been in my theory. I might care to write a little thesis on the subject? My respect and admiration for the President of Smith College has been kept at fever height by the fact that no one else has ever made me feel as though I had the sort of scholarly brain which could as a matter of course contribute something of any value to Shakespearean bibliography.

That proud thesis has not yet been written. Circumstances have made it impossible. You need to sit in a circle of quietness to write a thesis; the discordance of what is happening in the outside world no louder than the splash of a small pebble into a deep well in a garden far away; you also need not only your own library, but some great library accessible; and finally, as the doctor would say: "No worries, remember—that's the most important thing." Yet I shall go on hoping for a moment when I can settle down with all outer and inner conditions harmonious, to write my Shakespeare thesis. Occasionally I come across rough notes which I had thought might be useful, scribbled in some place where they might most easily get lost. Such as this:

"I am for the house with the narrow gate, which I take to be too little for pomp to enter: some that humble themselves may; but the many will be too chill and tender, and they'll

be for the flowery way that leads to the broad gate and the great fire.' —Spoken, mark you, by one of Shakespeare's clowns."

And this longer note:

"Shakespeare always scampers back to his plot at the end, even if the queer flash happens while he's at work and changes all his plans. Strange how he feels conscientiously compelled to get back to his borrowed tale at the end, unnaturally and in a hurry; like the finale in a Christmas pantomime, pairing off everyone in an improbable helter-skelter set-to-partners, and letting them say, as it were: 'Isn't it funny, I love *you* after all, not *you*.' Or: 'You see, I didn't know that the boy was a girl and the girl was my sister and I was myself [Arviragus].' Or: 'Well, as you stuck up for me, here's the girl you want and a rather barren piece of my kingdom.' "

"You stuck up for me" is all right. What drives us crazy is that sinister phrase: "I stuck up for you."

Judy, for instance. I have learnt to dread hearing Judy say with wide blue eyes uplifted for my approbation:

"But *I* stuck up for you."

What she expected from me was, of course, a shower of gratitude: "That's what I always *say* about you, Judy, you're so *loyal*. You're so different from all my *other* friends. You know, it makes *all* the difference if there's somebody one can really *trust*. I *do* wish you'd tell me, though, *who* it was talking about me like that behind my back, because then, you see, I'd know for the future."

Yes, that was undoubtedly what Judy expected. That, she felt, was no more than her due (if she really had stuck up for me, which I doubt).

What I actually said, and what all of us say when we hear

that sinister phrase, "I stuck up for you," was "Oh?" A carefully casual "Oh?" and at the same time a nicely weighed and balanced "Oh?" An "Oh?" that had to express utter indifference as to what any of my so-called friends might be saying of me in my absence, plus a ripple of disdain, plus a shade of acknowledgment to Judy, not too warm or deep, plus a well-bred desire to close the conversation so that I should hear no more of what was not intended for my ears. Incidentally, when I had got all that into "Oh?" the closed door, so to speak, had to be put slightly ajar again so that Judy could run on.

"Yes, I always stick up for you," repeated Judy, her "always" conveying that this conversation to my detriment was not the only occasion of treachery; that, indeed, it happened far more often than not. "I said: 'Well, I know her as well as any of you do, and I don't think it's fair to judge people only by what you hear from other people; and anyhow,' I said, 'I don't believe *one word* of it—'"

"—I said," added Judy. The pet.

"People will gossip," I remarked lightly.

Judy waited. Presently she went away, poignantly disappointed. My visible reactions must have been unsatisfactory.

Self-respect had to be maintained at all costs. I could only hope that Limpid Little Mischief had not guessed the turmoil she had started in my breast.

"Breast" is the poetical name for the region where these turmoils happen; pointing more exactly, I should place it at the pit of the stomach and the back of the head . . .

How dare anybody, how *dare* anybody puncture the mystic envelope enshrining one's sacred and inviolate self? How dare anybody give any Judy the chance to say smugly, "I stuck up for you"!

A horrid picture, Judy sticking up for me.

Besides, what is there to stick up about? Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Now the funny thing about all this is, we know perfectly well that things are not ever as fair behind our back as they are to our face. We know—let us be honest—by what we ourselves say to the others about whichever other isn't present. It is not treachery; but a sort of cosiness. We are aware, therefore, with our minds, with our psychological intelligence, and by personal experience that nobody can be the single exception in a world of victims. And yet we cannot bear to have this knowledge even slightly verified.

Were I to write a masque on this burning subject, I should call it "Fantasy Triumphant over Reality." For still, defying experience, still, if we happen to be the first to leave a party and we happen to have acquitted ourselves moderately well, if we have been *en veine*, amusing and witty or comforting or profound or just sweet, still as we walk down the stairs and into the street, little irrepressible fragments of dialogue dance through our heads . . . Hush . . . Listen . . . We are happily building up the appreciative conversation that we have just left behind us; the praise which burst forth the instant we were out of earshot: "Isn't she *wonderful!*" the least of it. And we smile: "Dear but foolish of them!"

For the rest of that day I was recurrently tormented by Judy's "I stuck up for you." It twitched at my vanity and bothered my lofty peace. Indignation was seething at the pit of my stomach, and fury tightly lacing the back of my head. Not rage all the time; often I melted into pathos: here I am, alone in the world, really putting up rather a brave fight, trying to be decent, trying to be staunch and generous. (Look at what I just managed not to say the other day about Edda.

Or did I say it? Oh, well, never mind!) And all I ask in return is to be let alone, given a chance. But as soon as you are down, they trample on you: It's the herd instinct.

Imagination swelled the scene: there were all those graceless, faceless people, my friends; faceless, because I could not with any certainty identify them. But there they were, in a group, sitting, standing, drinking cocktails, and just saying things, beastly untrue things; voluptuously enjoying the saying of them.

Go to them and demand: "What have you been saying about me?"

No, I won't. No. Because it isn't as if I minded. Or if I do, I mind for their sakes, not my own.

"I stuck up for you. You've got *one* friend, at any rate!" Judy tripping briskly from home to home, recounting her loyalties. And then applying salve and butter when you haven't even shown her your sores. When she brings in her reports, a slight tendency to shake her head over human nature and at the same time to be ever so tolerant of it . . . If one had to be alone in the world, one would infinitely have preferred to be entirely alone; not ignominiously alone-except-for-Little-Judy.

Better if one had not been stuck up for. That in itself puts one in rags, sitting on a cold doorstep, selling matches.

Everybody talks about everybody, only one mustn't *know*. What the hell did Judy want to tell me for?

After I had thus delivered my mind about Judy, the group of my friends sitting on the terrace were for a short while very silent. It happened that we were the group among whom the little cherub most busily perambulated. After a self-conscious pause, and by way of an antidote, as Judy was not

present to supply the sticky loyalties, we selected those acquaintances (not friends) whom we most disliked, and said sharp things about them:

"She behaves to him all the time as if she were a bruised peach."

"In a few ill-chosen words unsuitable to the occasion."

"When she gets angry over what one would think is a perfectly detached subject, it means the umbilical cord has been twitched which attaches it to her special complex."

"His mind has a 'fault' in the strata, as there is under Santa Monica, only you're not aware of it till you get the earthquake."

"Most people have some sort of bus-service between their brains and their emotions, but in his case it doesn't even run twice weekly."

"I should say it's a pity he's got the courage of his convictions; otherwise, no one need ever know he had them."

"She's a Lady not-very-Bountiful."

"He rushes away whenever he sees me, as though he had the idea that I turn all men into laurel bushes."

"Poor lamb, he's had his character shredded by over-understanding."

As the image of Judy faded, gossip continued, but the remarks grew kinder:

"It's such a comfort to have her living in the home; she knows the sequence of your inconsistencies."

This, we all realise, is as pleasant as a log-fire unless "she" happens not only to know the sequence of your inconsistencies, but also to remind you, with an air of naïve surprise, that you had thought *quite* differently about So-and-so a year ago. *Then* she is like a log-fire that smokes and makes your eyes smart. Someone who shares your daily life, who has the courage and virtue of inconsistency in her own likes and dis-

likes (except of course towards yourself), is indeed not only good company, but irreplaceable good company.

This same excellent she, or it may be he, is also a vital necessity in the home if you yourself happen to be the sort of person who finds it impossible not to quote. Naturally I do not mean the tiresome self-indulgence which adorns conversation with rich embroidery of quotation from the poets; not only is such self-indulgence curable, but no time should be lost in curing it. But the more insidious quotation of odd unimportant phrases, chosen and remembered by who-knows-what random process of selection (a form of literary kleptomania), that get themselves into the household idiom, settle down there, and make themselves for ever comfortable. They cannot be flung out again because, however absurd, however trivial, once you have discovered a short cut in speech by allusion, you will never want to trudge the whole distance by the long highroad again. And not only is it a question of "two can play at that game," but two or more *must* play at it, or the swift convenience and the joy of allusion are obviously lost.

The context of a "Hamlet" quotation can be universally recognised; but only your immediate circle, we imagine, will get the idea of "falsely genial in a knitted coat," which occurred in a short story by Sylvia Lynd: A man was having a bad time in the wrong sort of house party; he describes in the first person how the baby was brought in: "falsely genial in a knitted coat." That is precisely the subtle twist of phrase which you hail with a shout of pleasure, and which will remain behind when the rest of the story has dropped from your memory. After a visitor has left the room, pleased, no doubt, at having left behind a good impression: "She's in her knitted coat," you remark, casual and cruel, to your crony who is familiar with the falsely genial baby; and that will be enough to sum up the whole of the last two hours.

We may *quote* from, let us say, "Hamlet," "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer" and so forth, but we could just as easily conduct daily conversation with "Hamlet" eliminated; not missing it as we should miss using that querulous complaint, "Nobody tells me anything"—to express our Suspicion, half aggrieved, half joking, of being kept out of the family secrets, which originated with old James Forsyte, father of Soames, brother of Jolyon, created by Galsworthy.

And when somebody employs loose exaggeration to impress us ("Apple blossom *everywhere!*"), how easy to subdue her with Lady Caroline's airy snub: "Surely only on the apple-trees?" Saki? Yes, you recognise him, of course. Close all the windows and doors, and it still becomes difficult to keep Saki from trickling in. The ponderous giants of literature do not supply these savoury odds and ends; they supply Quotation on a grand scale, but we have already discovered that that is quite different from the intimate collection now exhibited:

"Sorry for wolves"—I think I first met the expression in a book by Sylvia Townsend Warner: "The Pure Heart." The young heroine of the novel, known among countryfolk as "an innocent," during a severe winter and in the very depths of her own and local misfortunes, finds time to be unnecessarily sorry for those ravening wolves up in the arctic regions who perhaps might not be getting enough food in the bitter snowy weather. Here is an indispensable short cut when you wish to intimate that someone is wasting sympathy for some wholly farfetched problematic sorrow: "Oh, God, sorry for wolves *again!*" you groan.

Everyone has his or her own individual list; this is merely to show how the items get picked up and worked in.

Years ago, Sinclair Lewis told me an anecdote which ended, on a fine simple lesson in contentment: "Take away the cow." That story deserves a place in our random collection: A peas-

ant and his family have to sleep in the same room with the hens; he asks the local Rabbi for a remedy; but to his bewilderment, the Rabbi suggests first that he should add his goat and furthermore, a week later, his cow to the already miserably overcrowded room. At the end of a fortnight of this intolerable discomfort, he goes yet again to the Rabbi, still faintly trustful that a remedy can be found for despair. "It is well," said the wise man, "your troubles are at an end. Go home and take away the cow." And it is an undeniable truth that after a fortnight cheek by jowl, so to speak, with a cow, the hens, formerly so obstreperous, will hardly seem to be there any more. "Take away the cow," only uses up a few seconds to say; while to expound the creed and psychology underlying the incident, would be a matter of hours.

From H. G. Wells's "Kipps," "buttud toce" remains behind, and "cubbuds," and "Oh, Ann, I *been* so mis'bel." And finally: "Oo, I dunno," which is Kipps's final summing-up after a struggle to express himself on the world and "the Rum Go everything is." "Oo, I dunno" comes as close to it as we can hope from any more fine-sounding philosophy.

Back to Galsworthy to borrow a snub in typical Soames Forsyte style; his daughter Fleur had carried on too enthusiastically over a picture he had given her: "Oh, Dad, how jolly!" But Soames disliked hyperbole and metaphor and symbolism. "It isn't," he said; "it's a monkey eating fruit." And that was that, for use when we dislike hyperbole and metaphor and symbolism: "It's a monkey eating fruit."

"What little Jerome wants"—and now we are slightly misquoting Saki towards the end of "The Unbearable Bassington"—"what little Jerome wants is a real deep cherry pie. A real *deep* cherry pie," his relatives kept on. That was what little Jerome wanted. They had brought little Jerome to Vienna, and he might have had anything to eat he fancied, but he

wanted a real *deep* cherry pie. Here is a good phrase to express the need of something certainly unprocurable at that moment, but what little Jerome (or indeed yourself or any of your friends) happens to want so persistently that nothing else will do.

And touching on the *New Yorker*: "Moritz, make like Chevalier for the Schwartzes!" Moritz was an awful little boy; his mother was proud of him; the Schwartzes had come to call; Maurice Chevalier was at the height of his popularity. "Look," we say of a friend who is showing off for some special purpose, and doing it pretty badly because Nature has not equipped him for the purpose, "look, he makes like Chevalier for the Schwartzes."

"Mr. Polly," by H. G. Wells, no less than "Kipps," has flung us some vivid odds and ends for familiar handling. "It's fair Itchabod, ol' man"; and "little dog, eating my bicycle tire," when you want to get away in a hurry and have no proper excuse ("little dog . . ." by itself is enough to those who know); and "he appears to have brought you a present of fish"—that was the earnest young man at the inn, you will remember, when drunken Uncle Jim was after Mr. Polly with a dead eel in his hand.

That cabbages are beautiful was first discovered by Selina in Edna Ferber's "So Big." But we usually call it "cabbages is beautiful," which is how the Dutch farmer retailed it with roars of foolish laughter: "Cabbages is beautiful!" For he could not see the world with Selina's eyes.

"The other bootie" needs careful explanation if you do not happen to have read C. E. Montague's "Rough Justice." The small boy cried, "Look at my bootie standing next to his friend the other bootie." In my private collection, it stands for a sort of Castor-and-Pollux, Damon-and-Pythias relationship. Perhaps it sounds a bit infantile, but what one collects

and uses is somehow not wholly under one's adult and literary control.

If you have read "1066 and All That," you will realise "the Barons should not be tried except by a special jury of other Barons who would understand," illustrates perfectly, with maybe a sly wink towards connivance, our natural if secret desire to save time and explanation by letting our acts be judged always and only by those "other barons who would understand."

"I love fruit when it's expensive," said Paula Tanqueray, and we all know *that* feeling. And while we are discussing food: "Rich damp cake," said Captain Hook. And Barrie's line from "Peter and Wendy": "There's another little boy in my bed," expressing a rueful suspicion that while you were away you have been supplanted in some intimate and valued friendship, may well become one of your indispensable reach-me-downs.

From Kenneth Grahame's "Wind in the Willows," the phrase I find myself using most often in vehement dispraise of almost anything is: "*horrid* little cart, *common* little cart, *canary-coloured* cart!" And when someone is swaggering and blowing himself up: "Intelligent Mr. Toad!" ("She asked, 'Who is that handsome man?' and they answered, 'Mr. Toad!'"")

Rebecca West mentioned in one of her review articles: "Surprise made me look like a goldfish," and that, too, is pretty useful once you have laid hands on it. You are more than just surprised; surprise has made you look like a goldfish.

Two more items that have been with me for some time; and then a handful only recently adopted but already showing signs of strong wear and tear. "She must have seen something nasty in the woodshed!" . . . That, I should say, with its

mockery of the Freudian School overdoing it, has become fairly universally understood. It originated in Stella Gibbons's "Cold Comfort Farm," where the old grandmother of ninety was still privileged to have three meals brought up to her bedroom every day because at the age of four she had seen something nasty in the woodshed.

And when maddening people of the slipshod-amiable type ask you to have a "nice" this or a "nice" that, hoping that the facile use of the adjective may delude you into easy acceptance, then you can find cool satisfaction in recalling a fragment of dialogue between Stanhope and his batman in "Journey's End": "'Ave a nice cup of tea, sir?' And Stanhope, his patience strained to breaking-point, looks up with the biting retort: "Can you *guarantee* that it's *nice*?"

About two years ago, a group of us happened to read "The Sword in the Stone" by T. H. White. And for a brief while conversation became so cryptic by its close association with that most delightful, most magical of books, as to be really tiresome to the uninitiated. I have left out nearly everyone's inevitable references to "Alice in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking-Glass" because, as in Hardy's "Jude the Obscure," "we are too menny" (and this tragic reference is one of those, I fear, which I use constantly and flippantly). "The Sword in the Stone" challenged "Alice" by the number of its contributions to our daily talk. Gradually, however, they sifted themselves out; and I will content myself by noting down only one (for me) wholly indispensable fragment: "'Come along, Robin Hood,' snapped King Pellinore, for once in a temper, 'stop leaning on your bow with that look of negligent woodcraft!'"

"*With that look of negligent woodcraft.*" . . . And how did I manage to do without it, all these years? Gerald du Maurier's acting was done with negligent woodcraft. So also

do I perform certain strokes at ping-pong (it is wiser, however, before you take up a "negligent woodcraft" attitude after these, to make sure the shot really was *on* to the table).

Three invaluable short cuts have already been explained: "Mummy, he's *talking* to me." "Uncle John, what do you do when you feel *too* well in the morning?" "All right, you *did* hear a seal bark." Our best short cuts in conversation, however, cannot be publicly used for obvious reasons of decency and discretion; nor, Gentle Reader, can yours; so, like the other barons, you will understand.

Confucius said: "Hai was not one who gave me any assistance. He was invariably satisfied with anything I said." Confucius was well aware, in China in the sixth century B.C., of the evils of a council of yes-men.

There are two well-known forms of conversation: that which darts about and that which thumps along. Non-militant conversation, which consists of musing aloud, and clears away fog, is held to be conversation peace, but is liable to develop quickly, under stimulus, into more militant sounds. Indeed, there is something militant about all conversation; "stimulating" is itself a militant word.

Conversation does not "degenerate" into argument; it develops. Sometimes what was wit in a previous age remains witty no longer; yet, having thrown off its disguise of period costume, proves itself to be a statement of truth as well, probably because it has risen from the subconscious of a wise man stimulated by the friction of conversation, where otherwise it might have lain submerged for ever. Chivalry in conversation is superfluous; but without manners conversation is held up. Manners promote suppleness and, what is more rewarding, subtlety.

Solitary reverie often splits itself mentally into the form of

a conversation, because only then can you be sure of a protagonist who will handle you unselfishly and skilfully, bringing out the best that is in you. This may be why certain writers such as Hazlitt, Peacock, Oscar Wilde, George Moore and T. S. Eliot used the slightly formalised duologue to present their wisdom. (What is a racy English translation for *tête-à-tête*? I suppose "duologue" is the best we can do.) Under favourable conditions, duologue reveals the art of conversation at its most perfect. These conditions are, primarily, that you should only have conversation with your peers. You have to be able to trust to the presence of mind (a literal requirement) in your companion; for you forfeit all pleasure in talk if it degenerates into laborious and painfully tolerant explanation of what we meant five minutes ago. You can always recognise that you have neglected this important rule to keep to the company of your peers, when later you hear one of your happier phrases, local to the topic and the moment, picked up and used in admiration and in the wrong place. Live talk should never be a stately parade of knowledge punctuated by murmurs of approbation from a surrounding circle of yes-men, but an intensely personal and fortuitous thing, warm and intimate, the subject chosen haphazard; an Elixir Vitæ, breeding delicate intoxication shared to the same degree by the other protagonist. You cannot throw a remark into a stone-cold frying-pan, and then expect it to sizzle and dance and perform the same enchanting responses as little sausages flung into boiling fat.

In more numerous company, talk is in perpetual danger of being unlawfully annexed, not by the wittiest but by the most confident. We all know the strange depression that is apt to settle over the rest of us after the first forty minutes of listening to an eloquent monologue. One conversationalist does not make a conversation; on the other hand, he can wreck it.

Should you be yourself this solitary swallow making summer, the occasion may dilate your chest with glorious opinions of yourself, but will return you nothing of that joy in conflict, of defeat swiftly recovered, of snap and sparkle and tingle in the air, of that bracing sense of having to keep alert and use every talent you possess of mind and tongue, wit and memory, which rewards the unselfish conversationalist.

I should stress, among further requisites for good conversation, the mental flexibility of an acrobat, and the power of a Russian ballerina to conquer the law of gravity. One of Jane Austen's heroines was reprimanded for showing too much optimism in her demands:

"My idea of good company, Mr. Elliot, is the company of clever well-informed people who have a great deal of conversation."

"You are mistaken," said he gently, "that is not good company; that is the best."

The best of good company need not be a friend, but a good-tempered enemy (only temporarily an enemy) compounded in equal parts of the quality of steel and the quality of mercy. Then the fur flies; then the fun begins; then your subconscious yields up treasure after treasure. Then will arise a joy which is too elusive to be transcribed onto the written page, too fugitive to be related afterwards with any enviable effect on those who have not been so lucky as to hear it. Most of us have suffered from the flatness of listening to complacent records of verbal victory punctuated with: "So *I* said . . . And then *he* said . . . Well, so *then* I said . . . I forget what he said to that, but when I said what I just told you I'd said, *he* had nothing to say at all!" I knew a woman who in her own reports of conversation was always apt, dignified and finally crushing; but she never showed herself picking up the other person and dusting him and restoring his confidence; this is

the same type of woman—or man—who tells you that she “said something rather good last week,” and never notices the paralysed silence after the “something good” has been produced, dead, on a plate.

Men, whatever their period and nationality, are more prone to generalise than women; they are a little timid of clinching argument with illustrations from the life-class. Only cut the cord that joins the abstract to a personal issue, and they will discuss anything, at any length. It is time that the weak silent woman should be recognised as a perpetual victim of the strong talkative man.

Good conversation is essentially an adult accomplishment. Children brag and exaggerate: a race of little Cyranos, little D’Artagnans, little Munchausens. They must grow up before they can learn to converse with the light mellow-hearted touch of Touchstone: “He uses his folly like a stalking-horse, and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit.”

Among adults, however, there are various schools of conversation, all admirable: the school of swift flashing repartee, and the school that fastidiously selects the exact moment for a passado and places it with precision; the school hardly able to speak for chuckling at its own humour (we are not amused by this school) and the opposite sadder school of Grimaldi which sees nothing funny in Grimaldi. There is Talk Ruthless and Talk Chivalrous; Talk Mellifluous and Talk Suggestive; Talk Academic and Talk Anecdotal. Of the latter, might it be settled once and for all what is the answer, courteous yet expedient, to “Mind you stop me if you’ve heard this before”? It is a hard matter to hear a bad story twice, and Tusitala himself would be the first to declare a good story slain by repetition. And yet how unreasonably snubbed, how jarred you yourself are apt to feel, when, as requested, you are suddenly stopped in your stride. There is also Talk Epigram-

matic; but that, I have reason to know, is completely out of period; for in this vein I once remarked, "You were born with a mental reservation in your mouth instead of a silver spoon"—and joyfully my opponent carved my self-esteem into a thousand slices, by a lazy comment to the effect that round about 1908 (but not later than 1909) he had abundantly littered a grateful country with just this type of epigram.

The true conversationalist should be unexpected and permanently potential. He should magically inspire you to believe yourself an inspired person; and leave you in such exultant state of mind that, long after the lights are out and the guests have gone home, you cannot but continue, smiling a little, to make your points and invent their counterpoints (we imagine that this occasionally may be happening, by delayed action, in a Trappist Monastery).

With a divine sense of geographical irrelevance, we had been reading George Moore's "Conversations in Ebury Street" up at our little Hebridean hotel; and it must have been because of this that our own conversation swerved into a literary argument. Not, as far as George Moore is concerned, that he could ever serve as a model for any conversation or argument on the give-and-take, fifty-fifty basis; there are two lines in the early part of "Conversations in Ebury Street" at which I never cease marvelling:

"After a pause during which Mr. Husband was kind enough to wait for me to collect my thoughts, I said . . ."

Mr. Husband, when he goes to heaven, will not be awarded a further halo; he is haloed already for conspicuous chivalry towards one not in need of it.

Not unnaturally, we then found ourselves involved in the eternally interesting discussion of whether George Moore qual-

ified as a literary giant. Did egoism disqualify an author from gianthood? And which little Jack among us should dare to run him through with our little sword?

On the other hand, should he not instead go into a Perfection Box?

The Perfection Box, therefore, sprang alive as Minerva out of Jupiter's headache, from this conversation at Christmas in Loch Alsh. And was hauled out as a long-desired convenience every time in the future when any of us were having a thorough clean-up among writers. It was like suddenly being presented with a shoe-suitcase to add to your luggage, where before you had only an ordinary suitcase, and the shoes were crammed in with the rest of your things. (But of this, more hereafter.)

Who, then, went into this shining, neatly lined receptacle? The first answer provided also the greatest problem: Jane Austen. Of course, usher her into the Perfection Box. Who so worthy?

But then cries of angry dissent: "Jane Austen should go among the giants!" For why should the giants have all those loose, lumbering, rugged characteristics which appertained to mere size? Why should they stride about and be craggy?

Tolstoy, we were aware without argument, could be put on the giant heap; where we could also pile up Dostoevski and Balzac, Dickens and Thackeray; Zola (Yes, No, Yes, No, Yes); Hardy; Meredith (more wrangling at this point: "No, No, Yes"); Walt Whitman, Yeats, Shaw, Wells. A dog-fight over Bennett: he wrote "The Old Wives' Tale"?—followed by the usual question: "But was it enough for gianthood, to have written one great epic novel?" If it was, that at once gathered in Emily Brontë, and threw out Charlotte.

Two of us hotly contested that "giant" can only be defined in the abstract sense of genius: try to eliminate the physical

Rabelaisian association. "In that case," the other two replied, "we don't require a Perfection Box at all."

"But, my dear man, if you can perceive no more distinction than what divides big bearded men with leonine untidy manes of hair, from small ladies with shapely delicate wit—"

The ensuing clamour then proved how sadly we failed to come up to the standards of Mr. Husband.

A curious point of view was put forward, that when an author's work shows passion, he or she gets automatically registered in the giant class. "Jane Austen," once remarked a certain critic, making the most colossal misstatement of his career, "Jane Austen has no passion to give us. Perfection, yes; passion, no."

No passion? But perhaps this superficially judging person had never read "Sense and Sensibility"; had forgotten Marianne's agony when Willoughby was false? Within its own formula of exquisitely plaited technique, it trembles with the very passion of King Lear disappointed of his daughters.

Jane Austen really is the only writer whom we can leave with full assurance that she belongs triumphantly to giants and the Box. Yet if, forsaking the giants, she ultimately moved for good into the Perfection Box, obviously she would fill up too much of the space; practically all there was. For whom could we slip in round the sides?

Stevenson, perhaps? That enchanting talker, who "would keep a houseful or a single companion entertained all day, and day after day and half the nights, yet never seemed to monopolise the talk or absorb it; rather he helped every one about him to discover and to exercise unexpected powers of their own." A lull in the dispute while it was affectionately settled that he was not quite great enough to join the giants on their mountain peak (and who would have known it better than he?) and that to reckon him as Perfection was an invitation

to the Wrong Box. He belongs to that amiable cluster of writers whom we shall always love a little better than their works.

Off we started again with the right type of applicant: Max Beerbohm, Lewis Carroll. Marcel Proust. Kenneth Grahame. None of these bestrides the narrow earth like a colossus, yet their genius could not be denied. What about Saki and P. G. Wodehouse, Neil Lyons and perhaps Stella Benson (argument over Stella Benson), E. M. Forster, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Evelyn Waugh (argument became impolite and a little hysterical)?

Somebody interrupted with a lusty bellow demanding that Chesterton be thrust among the giants. And someone else said Kipling. And someone else said that Kipling only excelled at short stories, which meant the Perfection Box for him and for Chekhov—"No, no, Chekhov was a *giant*!" And we were back again where we began, with another half-hour sped away and nothing settled.

But the interlude had given us a new basis on which to build the following definition: that a man can count as a giant only if enough of his work is in that class and on that scale. Many critics, talking of "War and Peace," would insist on the terrific, the overwhelming conception of the first half, saying: "The rest isn't quite as good." But to go into the Perfection Box, all your achievement must be equally good; you may not win a way into the Perfection Box leaving a scatter of unworthy performances behind you on the floor; the whole of your output must tuck in together.

Take Max. Has he ever written one line which is not as witty and immaculate and fastidious and elegantly dandified as his every other line? Perfection and more perfection and yet again perfection and even now perfection.

Or Kenneth Grahame: "The Wind in the Willows"; "The

Golden Age"; "Dream Days"; a short story in the *Yellow Book*, "The Headswoman." No more, and not a speck nor flaw on any of them.

And P. G. Wodehouse. With all our swaggering broad-mindedness, it would look pretty silly to have him striding from mountain peak to mountain peak, between, say, Dostoevski and Hardy. But he, too, is among that little immortal group who walk so lightly and with such ease that they never seem to lurch off the chalk-line. Some of us may prefer Bertie Wooster to Psmith; a large congregation shouts for Mulliner; an overwhelming vote to Jeeves; and there are even those, though I am not among them, who have a weakness for Ukridge (their names are like seven sweet symphonies). But I believe I have never yet heard anyone say: "This time it isn't a good Wodehouse."

We are, I must once again emphasise, a little inclined to be influenced by physical appearance when separating the giants from their smaller but more perfect species; and our reluctance to call Jane Austen a giant can be matched by a strong feeling that if Browning or Tennyson or Carlyle, those three picturesque musketeers, dark and hairy, tobacco-stained and broad-shouldered, their cloaks stormily flung about them, had happened to be master-craftsmen in the cobweb style, spinning their gleaming threads into a dapper pattern, we should still feel they were a trifle too disorderly and a bit too much of an outsize for the Perfection Box; whereas Barrie, physically of elfin size and neatness, we might easily beckon to step inside without an unbiased examination as to whether perhaps he may not, after all, belong to the giants.

No, I think not. There are boundaries to what he can achieve; and even a five-mile limit is enough to send you off the mountains and into the box. Within his self-imposed radius, he has a twinkling consistency and a chuckling success.

Certainly we could point out, say one page in "Mary Rose," half a page in "Dear Brutus," a bitter few moments in "The Will," which could flash him at once out of the Box and into the Giant group.

But by far the greater part of his work renders him supremely eligible to dart through that symbolical aperture—which has a deplorable tendency every moment to become more and more like a little arched doorway, rose-entwined, into the House We Built for Wendy, and less and less like the convenient self-respecting shoe-suitcase which it was before we began to mention Barrie.

It is clear that a short period of astringency is indicated; and so let me recommend Sarah Orne Jewett escorted by Logan Pearsall Smith, as a very perfect couple for the Perfection Box. Logan Pearsall Smith (we have not quite shaken off the temptation to be slightly Barrie-ish in the way we assemble this company) might well, were it not for Max, be king of the Perfection Box. Were it not for Max and Walter de la Mare, that fine filigree watchmaker among writers.

And should we decide to elect none of these three because they are equally flawless, it is a thrilling if eccentric discovery that the crown might go, after due consideration, to Walt Disney. Anyone who objects that he is a producer of films and not an author, will be met by the stern reminder that he creates characters where no characters were before; and whereas many so-called authors have done less, few could be said to have done more.

Most authors know the difficulty of reproducing real or semi-real conversation. One does not want to give credit nor discredit either, by allotting remarks to people who did not make them. The dialogue of invented people always sounds a bit bright and bogus; and if you camouflage the conversa-

tion of real characters by pretending they are invented characters, you are liable to give the whole thing away by quoting a remark which they might remember as well as yourself. You can compromise and, neither inventing names nor using actual names, make your characters converse as abstractions called, say, "The Lady with the Pekinese" or "The Keen-Eyed Man" (Dorothy Parker would remark, "At this point Constant Weader fwowed up"); but to my mind the only two authors who succeeded in the device of calling their characters by abstract names were Bunyan and P. G. Wodehouse:

"'He'll have to let it grow or shave it off,' said the Whisky and Splash. 'He can't go on sitting on the fence like this. Either a man has a moustache or he has not. There can be no middle course.'"

"The thoughtful pause which followed these words was broken by a Small Bass.

"'Talking of moustaches,' he said, 'you don't seem to see any nowadays, not what I call moustaches. What's become of them?'"

"'I've often asked myself the same question,' said a Gin and Italian Vermouth.'"

The demon of mischief, the Poltergeist which every now and then takes control of conversation as much as it controls the inexplicable loss of one's handbag or the extraordinary mistakes in appointments or addresses, insures with a regularity rather uncommon in the Poltergeist species that whenever there is a lull in conversation, that disconcerting silence when the waves for an instant suddenly cease to crash, a beautiful little remark is heard to plop into the very middle of it; devastating sometimes, or merely indiscreet or naïvely indecent. Thus, during a sudden quietness at a dinner-party, after all our voices had been surging together, it was pleasant to hear our host speaking alone to his neighbour; in the distinct mat-

ter-of-fact tones of one who gives information and no more: "If you want Swinburne's house, your best way is to go along the East Sheen Road and it's the next house past Boots the Chemist."

If she had wanted Swinburne's house, I should have said that her best way was to visit it in the greatest possible comfort, away from the traffic and the clatter, sunk deep in a plumply cushioned armchair, reading Sir Max Beerbohm's essay on Swinburne and Watts-Dunton, "No. 3 the Pines"—in my opinion one of the six perfect essays written in the English language (E. V. Lucas, I am sure, would not have agreed with me; "it was a lover and his Lamb," and his six awards would all have gone to Elia).

This important question of the most comfortable position for reading has never yet been fully investigated. I once shyly asked Max Beerbohm himself, sitting next to me at a dinner-party, whether, reading in bed, he lay on his honourable front or his deeply revered back. He reflected for a moment, anxious to be truthful and explicit in his reply; then, with a flicker of the longest eyelashes in Europe or Hollywood towards the door of his hostess's bedroom, he replied in his usual confidential whisper: "Do you know, I'm afraid I shall have to go to bed to show you."

People have pretty illusions about the best position for reading, as about everything else. I once heard two ladies behind me at a cinema having a glorious row. From the acrimony of tone and intimacy of allusion you could gather that they were relations. One of them at the peak of injury said: "But you *could* have invited Lewis instead of me; I shouldn't have *minded*; I'm not the *kind* that minds; I should have been *perfectly* happy at home curled up with a book." Presently I stole a look at her. Her build was tall, gaunt, angular and uncompromising. Not the kind that curls readily. Yet in

her mind's eye someone small, juvenile and deliciously rounded could be seen absorbed and breathing hard, a happy little dimpled bundle on the window-seat, "curled up" with a book.

Once, to make conversation with an earnest woman who was boring me, I idly asked: "Do you like books?" But I had not expected her to lean forward and with conscientious precision, enquire: "Do you mean books or reading?"

One can ponder on this splitting of a hair until one goes a little mad. For indeed it has a mad quality: thus might the Hatter or the Frog Footman cantankerously have questioned Alice. For which *did* one mean, books or reading? Do they mean the same thing?

No, they do not. The lover of books who discriminates between fine shades of printing and paper and layout, by whom the width and balance of margins is more valued than the meaning between the margins, he who will fling away an entire series of the *Yellow Book* because, on the back of the first volume, "April" is not spelt with an "f" (valuable misprint which stamps it as the original edition) that lover of books as books will have nothing in common with the lover of reading who prefers his well-thumbed Hazlitt or Malory (it has to be well-thumbed), his battered old shilling edition of "Emma" (essential that it should be battered) to all the rare and fastidious collection in the library of the connoisseur.

That "books furnish a room, so I always think," has been said by many an amateur of interior decoration. Reading, on the other hand, hardly furnishes a room at all. In sad cases it has been known to defurnish a room, when indulged until the cows come home and the brokers come in.

The *Yellow Book* was considered dynamite when the Bodley Head first published it (the Bodley Head which for seven of the best years of my life was two floors below my own chambers in Albany). Among other bold young authors of

the period, Kenneth Grahame, Max, and H. G. Wells wrote for it. Henry Harland was the editor. Beardsley designed the format and contributed many of the illustrations.

Books that shock, and books that cease to shock. Charlotte Brontë was considered shocking once, and then Ouida and Rita. "The Picture of Dorian Gray" was particularly shocking. "The Dolly Dialogues" were daring, with their frilly repartee. "Three Weeks" was forbidden to us in our teens—it was too passionately shocking; so were the novels of Victoria Cross. Then came "Poppy" and "South Wind" and "The Green Hat"—nearer our own times now; "Ulysses" moves over the horizon into sight; "The Well of Loneliness," "Vile Bodies," "Eyeless in Gaza," "There's a Porpoise Close Behind Us," and "Mr. Norris Changes Trains." And from America, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, John O'Hara.

Odd that there should be no book which is permanently shocking.

The name of George Eliot always rouses a twinge of guilt in my subconscious. This twinge had better be examined and settled. The way of least resistance is paved with the classics you have not read; yet you continue to dwell with an impression of having read the book in question; and every time it is mentioned you say, "Oh, yes!" and discuss it cautiously. But honesty nags at you in that bothering voice which honesty has, reminding you that you have *not*, in point of fact, read "Silas Marner." At last, however, honesty has had to shut up: I *have* read "Silas Marner." The classics come home to us in irrelevant places and by fantastic routes. I had to read "Silas Marner" in a couple of hours in Hollywood with the idea of knowing it (literally) backwards at a studio conference the next day. They thought it would make a darn good film.

These peculiar gaps in reading happen particularly to

authors. For authors are constitutionally incapable of buying books. It is pitiful to witness their pain and horror when it is suggested by anyone of blunt sensibilities: "Well, why don't you buy it?" Often they swoon. Books, they know well, should descend on them like manna and snow, softly from the skies; generously from publishers; inevitably with gracious inscription from that multitude of friends who are also authors; in clean cool battalions as review copies; casually by right divine.

There are two ways of giving your own books—

("You haven't given me your new book yet.")

("Well, no . . . I'm terribly sorry, but the truth is that I don't like you very much, and don't know you very well, and the author only gets six presentation copies; so—")

("Oh, but surely"—with a disbelieving laugh—"surely you have as many copies as you want of *your own* book, to give away!")

("If I pay for them, yes. At the usual trade price.")

("Pay for your own book!" Ripples of incredulous laughter. "Well, I shall think it *very mean* if you don't give me one. After all, it isn't as though you had to buy it!")

—Two ways:

One way, you make the parcel yourself. The other way, the better way—oh, the infinitely better way!—your publisher makes it; you spend ten minutes signing the copies at his office, and saying where they are to go; and the person receiving one has all the peculiar satisfaction of undoing that fascinating, firmly fashioned, clearly featured rectangle, all its corners sharply marked; and of finding your book inside, competently cradled in the proof-sheets of other books by other authors from the same publisher: most interesting, most tantalising reading; more interesting, certainly, than the book itself.

On the other hand, your book in a homemade parcel is apt to arrive looking as lopsided and apologetic as the washing that has been left behind and sent on from the seaside; your secretary is usually talented enough to go away for her holidays a few days before the presentation copies have to be sent out.

While I was writing my first book, and living in Holland Park, I went often on a pilgrimage, with another friend who was also writing her first book, to a region mysteriously sophisticated called the West End. We stood outside the romantic premises of the Bodley Head and wondered if our luck would ever be in (luck out, luck in) so that we should publish there. A great many years afterwards, the owner of the Bodley Head came up the necessary seventy-three stairs for a cocktail. The talk happened to turn on the difficulty of making parcels, and he very kindly suggested that any time I wanted a parcel made up, all I need do was to send it down-stairs to his packing-room. That was being really neighbourly, and I thanked him warmly; amused again at the contrast between then and now, at how the past washes up to the present, but rarely in a way we had ever expected or imagined possible.

At least fifty per cent of your friends used to prefer their books fresh and wet from the press. To these you would, of course, always have given what was known as the Book of the Moment. If you gave somebody the Book of the Moment, somebody else would also give you the Book of the Moment. And that was nice. But this traffic had to be scrupulously timed, for it had little other virtue except its—should I say, contemporaneosity? A Book of the Moment would obviously have been too ripe for eating a fortnight later.

There was no serving both God and Mammon when you wished to make a graceful present of a book. Either you

considered the inside, or you considered the outside. In the latter event, having remembered the exact colour-scheme of the recipient's room, you entered the bookshop, and said firmly: "I *must* have a pink book with violet shading; nothing else will do!" For—it is of no use to be too superior and scholarly about it!—books *do* furnish a room, and much less expensively than with fire-screen and cushions.

Mooching about one's own bookshelves is a temptation not easily resisted by the book-conscious. You fall into it as you fall into a trance, as you fall into deep water. The book-conscious mentality cannot, for instance, catch sight of the grass-green cover and the white label of "Mr. Polly" as it was first published in Nelson's two-shilling experiment, without remembering how in the muddled hinterland of that little shopman's brain, imagination and a deep love of words had flourished and survived:

"Words attracted him curiously, words rich in suggestion, and he loved a novel and striking phrase. . . New words had terror and fascination for him. He did not acquire them, he could not avoid them, and so he plunged into them. His only rule was not to be misguided by the spelling."

Can Mr. Polly, entranced by words, ever have read "Trivia"?

" 'Don't you love our deposit of Persian words in English? To me they glitter like jewels in our Northern speech. *Magic* and *Paradise*, for instance; and the names of flowers and gems and rich fruits and tissues—*Tulip* and *Lilac* and *Jasmin* and *Peach* and *Lapis Lazuli*, ' I chanted, 'and *Azure* and *Taffeta* and *Scarlet*. ' "

And after that, imagine a flower-bed of Persians flaunting their *thoublybans*, their turbans, their tulips.

For every essay that has been written on the pleasures of reading, seven might be written on the pleasures of re-reading.

Parted from one's own books, as so many of us are nowadays, by drama of war and air-raids, we are apt to value extravagantly that odd fluctuating handful which has accompanied us from place to place, or else to become unreasonably irritated with it. (Yes, certainly, of this more hereafter.) Only last week I bought a small mahogany bookcase, solid and unpretentious, to take the motley remnant of a library which, under the impression that I was Mary and they were the little lambs, has chosen to follow me round and round and down here to Brambleford, in the late Autumn of 1940:

My "well-thumbed" little Bible; and my well-thumbed little "Emma," and the rest of Jane Austen, equally well-thumbed.

My well-thumbed volume of Shakespeare, given me as my first school prize.

As you may (perhaps) have guessed by now: "Note-Books" by Samuel Butler.

Thomas à Kempis, and a duplicate copy of Thomas à Kempis in limper suède.

Two omnibuses by my bedside (omnibus; not to be confused with bus): E. F. Benson's "Lucia," and Mazo de la Roche's "Whiteoaks." These, with Sheila Kaye-Smith's two collections of stories about herself and her sister as children, make excellent re-reading. So do Sarah Orne Jewett, Kipling's "Rewards and Fairies" and "Puck of Pook's Hill," Confucius, "Cranford," Rose Macaulay's "Personal Pleasures," "Little Women," and "Good Wives"—the latter two volumes acquired illegitimately with old copies of "Vice Versa"; "Cometh Up As a Flower," and "The Benefactress" by Elizabeth, thrown in.

"Elizabethan Dedications and Prefaces": a book I would not exchange for a king's ransom, unless I could be assured that

part of the ransom could immediately buy me another copy and still leave a few castles over.

Keats and Tennyson, and Chesterton's "Ballad of the White Horse," and the Girls' Own Annual of 1890; these fell to me by an act of imagination, of which more hereafter. Indeed, most of this chapter is to come hereafter; you are really hardly reading it now at all. The fashions in the Girls' Own Annual of 1890 are very smart and succulent, under the heading, "Dress: In Season and in Reason, By 'The Lady Dressmaker,' " and one of the Answers to Correspondents has actually had the honour of shocking me deeply; I will not insert it. Here are three others:

"E.M.R.C.—You ought to be ashamed of yourself. To receive clandestine love-letters, when you owe filial confidence to your mother, and submission to her will and judgment, is most ungrateful as well as undutiful. But to take in letters of two men continually, through the blinds of your bedroom window, encouraging both at the same time, is simply disgusting! 'How shall I squash them?' is a heartless question after so much encouragement. It would be well if your mother were informed of your unseemly conduct, and would effectually 'squash' you."

"A Sad One.—The lady always speaks first, not the gentleman; so you were in the wrong, of course."

"Ignorance had better first find her publisher."

I have several poetry anthologies with me, and some separate volumes of poems by Edna St. Vincent Millay, Ford Madox Hueffer, Harold Monro, Stephen Spender. And finally, two autographed and inscribed copies of books fairly recently published and sent to me here by H. G. Wells and Somerset Maugham: "All Aboard for Ararat" and "Books and You."

Undoubtedly a heto collection; and if the adjective puzzles you, it is my personal way of slurring over a certain word

which I like to use, yet somehow I cannot get the hang of it; later on, it has "gen" in it; my secretary has generously offered to supply it in full, but I have proudly refused.

Not only myself but I am sure any other writer, and not only any other writer but any human being (there has been much argument as to whether writers are or are not human beings) would have enjoyed, as I did, the sight of "The Three Mulla-mulgars" taken down at my dictation and interpreted into typescript as "The Three Madame Olgas." This is a perfectly natural error for any secretary who happened not to know the book even by sight (I see that de la Mare himself now calls it "The Three Royal Monkeys"). But "The Three Madame Olgas"! What a novel could be written with this title. In the Chekhov style, I think: they would not have been three sisters, however, because then they would not all have been called Olga. But some mystic link must have bound them together; perhaps Pippa Passed; or, less mystic, perhaps they all lived in the same hotel, sailed in the same liner, worked in the same store, travelled by the same train, or even happened to sit in the same row of the dress-circle at the theatre one evening. The artist entrusted with the design for the book-jacket would show the three of them seated in a row, their chins propped on their hands, staring out into space. Dark, with high cheekbones, long earrings, and lips in the curve of a Russian smile (*ancien régime*).

Yes, no doubt an excellent book, "The Three Madame Olgas."

My portable typewriter has never again done anything quite so good, although I enjoy its rendering of the following two items from my rough notebook:

"Favourite names in childhood: Pearl, Reginald, Sylvia, Smallpox and Florrie."

I think, but cannot be sure, that Portable should have

placed a full stop, not a comma, after Sylvia; and should have typed Florrie and smallpox as a separate note referring to an incident of my nurse which I have already related.

Portable also typed "Kubla Kahn"—as though he might have been brother to Otto Kahn. And "the Welsh Boarder." And "young juvenile to play leading roll."

I do not, of course, approve of giving whimsical names to inanimate objects, and have never been guilty of chumming up with my bedroom slippers to the extent of calling them Alderney and Sark; but it did happen that my typewriter, from being "my portable," slid for convenience into being "Portable," and then acquired the good manly Elizabethan name of Amyas Portable. It is, in actual fact, by now practically an Elizabethan typewriter.

When typewriters, telephones, watches, and portable radios are not in working order, the temptation is great to make them come right by a good shaking, on the lines that it can perfectly enjoy the pepper when it pleases. It was during the tense war autumn of 1939 that, lying sleepy and relaxed, I stretched out towards my portable radio, which in spite of many shakings had not been working as it should, just to see if by some happy chance it had come right by itself. Startling me wide awake, Noel Coward's voice was suddenly in my room at Brambleford on the Berkshire Downs. He was somewhere in France singing "Mrs. Worthington" at a concert for the troops:

Please, Mrs. Worthington,
On my knees, Mrs. Worthington,
Don't put your daughter on the stage.

And instantly my thoughts flew (the cliché must be used here or never) to the last time I had heard this favourite song of mine:

It was in the big sitting-room of his country-house in Kent, with French windows opening onto a glorious wide view over the marshes, towards the English Channel. Gertie L wrence was rehearsing for an informal charity pier concert that evening, and Noel was at the piano accompanying her and occasionally joining in. I was hardly on speaking terms with him that day, because his dachshund had bitten me and torn my skirt without any provocation, and Noel, far from sympathising, had promptly translated the whole incident into a waltz, words and music complete: an excellent waltz, applauded by the rest of the party, yet I was not pleased. All the same, for such is my generous nature, I could not help praising the bitter psychological insight conveyed by his admonition to Mrs. Worthington, and his precise knowledge of her inflated attitude as regards her daughter's talents. I remarked: "You ought to add a verse: '*Don't* let your daughter try to write, Mrs. Worthington.'" And Noel, with more compassion for what I had suffered from this literary branch of all-the-Mrs.-Worthingtons than from the hideous ravages of his dachshund, replied that he would leave that verse to me: "But don't put too much agony into it."

The troops applauded Noel heartily. And next, Maurice Chevalier's voice was heard talking to them in eager broken English. Instantly (again) my thoughts flew to Hollywood:

I was wandering along the paths of the Paramount Studio garden, late for an appointment with Marlene Dietrich, and not sure which was her bungalow. My bump of locality, functioning in its usual weak and foolish style, led me to the wrong door, into Maurice Chevalier's dressing-room, and to that same voice talking eager broken English to another visitor whose booming insistent replies I recognised as coming from a certain executive not of that studio but another; and christened by all of us "Mr. Fawn"—not for his roguish slant-

ing-eyed appearance, but deriving from Mr. Foghorn by the same pronunciation route as (for example) Vaughan. Many years ago H. G. Wells wrote a short story in which a refined and cultured little spinster schoolmistress travelling in Italy meets a refined and cultured little schoolmaster, also travelling in Italy, and refuses to marry him because his name is Snooks; but a more enterprising friend of hers takes him in hand, and coaxes his name via Sennocks towards Sevenoaks: Mr. and Mrs. Sevenoaks, what could be nicer?

Mr. Fawn, Mr. Snooks, Mr. Horace Twiss . . .

Mr. Twiss was the first celebrity to catch my eye when I happened to pick up that fat shabby little sage-green volume which was Mr. Samuel Maunders's "Universal Treasury and Biographical Dictionary of the Lives of Eminent Persons of All Ages and Nations from the Earliest Period to the Present Time." Mr. Twiss is a melancholy confirmation of Mr. Maunders's incapacity to differentiate between the mortals and the immortals. For Horace Twiss he flourishes the loud trumpet of fame. Horace Twiss—

whose name will long be remembered in social, literary and political circles . . . In private life, Mr. Twiss was no less esteemed than in the world of literature and politics. In feeling he was a perfect gentleman. His amiable manners and convivial talents made him everywhere a welcome guest; while his own hospitality was undoubtedly shared by a wide circle of friends, among whom were many of the most distinguished persons in the country.

"Whose name will long be remembered . . ." Have you ever, dear reader of 1940, have *you* ever heard of Mr. Twiss? (I should look silly if you loudly answered Yes!) or of George Stubbs? or of Ignatius Sancho, a Negro? or of Joseph Mawe, or Guiccardini or the Younger Griffier? of Clootes, or Wil-

liam Clubbe, or even John Clubbe, his father? I should reckon the present-day survivals among the Truly Famous of this Universal Biography as one in fifty. *Sic transit gloria* Maunder.

VULSON, Marc de, sieur de la Colombière, a writer on heraldry. Having, while he resided at Grenoble, in 1631, surprised his wife with a gallant, and killed them both on the spot, he rode post to Paris to solicit a pardon. Died 1658.

Not unnaturally, I was enchanted. I liked the precision of mind in Mr. Samuel Maunder which caused him to give us the exact date on which the gentleman surprised his wife with a gallant; and I admired the firm rejection of any less important events in the life of the Sieur de la Colombière. Samuel Maunder, I said to myself, is the man for me. And went on reading.

My next discovery was equally fortunate: "JONES, Paul, a naval adventure." Followed nearly a column about JONES, Paul, with this elegant peroration.

He . . . was able to sustain his part respectably in the polished circles of Paris, where he was a great pretender to *ton*, and passed for "a poet as well as a hero."

And next, leaping from J to V:

VAILLANT, John Foi, a celebrated French medallist . . . On his voyage the ship was chased by another corsair, the dread of being again captured induced him to swallow his medals, which fortunately caused no serious injury.

This was the first time it had been brought to my notice that you not only had to earn your medals but swallow them, to win yourself a place in a biographical Treasury. Medals, I should say, were indigestible stuff, and I was glad that Mon-

sieur Vaillant suffered no more lasting discomfort from his meal.

I cast again, and brought up the case of Henry Cary, who "was addicted to poetry from his youth up."

Then I sat down to study seriously on what principle Samuel Maunder, a conscientious man, had compiled his dictionary. On the front page was a highly symbolical engraving with Wellington, Pitt, Napoleon, and two or three more shadowy celebrities in a circle of laurels from which was pendent a miniature of the young Queen Victoria, supported on one side by a nameless gentleman using compasses, and on the other a nameless gentleman drooping over a book. Above the main group sat Fame, a female with wings and a wreath; and behind her trailed an indistinct procession where I thought, but could not be sure, I could distinguish Raphael, Milton, Socrates, and Shakespeare dimly sketched in.

After a few hours spent with the Universal Biography, it seemed to me I had got the rough idea. Samuel Maunder took life solemnly. He knew he was bent on a great task, and had no doubt that in 1940 the same values would hold good as in 1851. The sheep and the goats are very clearly marked; no doubt anywhere, in the mind of Mr. Maunder, as to which was which. The Reverend Lisle Bowles, for example, whose sonnets "exercised no unimportant influence on English literature," was extolled with the enthusiasm his talents deserved:

In these sonnets there was observed a grace of expression, a musical versification, and especially an air of melancholy tenderness, so congenial to the poetical temperament . . . Mr. Bowles was very playful in his habits and conversation . . .

(Dear reader, would we have had Mr. Bowles to our house? We would not!)

But as against that, of another divine, Laurence Sterne, he says primly:

That Sterne possessed a fund of wit and humour, none who have read his works can doubt; but his occasional indecencies are disgusting, and considering his clerical character, deserve the severest reprehension.

Directly I discovered that Mr. Maunder was inclined to be hard on profligacy, I turned eagerly to the B's and looked up Byron, hoping for even juicier censure, and was not disappointed:

With a poetic taste that approached the sublime was sometimes mixed a reckless unalloyed profligacy, evidently the offspring of sensuality, and the parent of immoral consequences in others . . . we admire the commanding talents of Byron . . . we are compelled to deprecate the unholy purposes to which they were too often made subservient. "Prostituted genius is but splendid guilt."

A certain William Maginn gets a column and a half:

Let it not be supposed, however, that we are among those who think that the possession of genius exempts its possessor from the ordinary prudential rules.

Indeed, no. Let it not be supposed.

Moralizing is a catching complaint, and after an hour or two of Maunder I found myself spouting the most crocodilean platitudes on the evanescence of glory. Here, I said to myself, is a Universal Biography of all ages and all nations; and yet not a hundred years later, at least half these divines, these chemists, these French generals, these ladies of learning and piety, who in 1851 deserved columns of close print and laudatory tribute, are utterly unknown to myself and my genera-

tion. How salutary is the lesson; how fleeting the mark of our breath upon the window-pane!

Mr. Maunder's conclusions and awards are sometimes startling. Jane Austen, for instance, is dismissed in four and a half lines; whereas "Mrs. Grant of Laggan, a popular and instructive writer, whose maiden name was M'Vicar," has forty-nine lines of enthusiasm for such works as "Popular Models and Impressive Warnings from the Sons and Daughters of Industry," with a peroration to the effect that

the Christian resignation which she displayed amid many calamitous events, and her amiable character, no less than her literary celebrity, procured her general esteem and regard.

Was Mr. Samuel Maunder a hypocrite? I believe not. Certainly his phrasing and outlook appear much too good to be true; but he is deliciously—though in some ways gruesomely—a child of his period. While it is obvious that he is completely lacking in taste, humour, and discrimination, it is only fair to set against that the undoubted fact that he was honest and incorruptible, a man of worth, and what is better still, a man of curiosity.

His *Universal Biography* contains a heap of odd-shaped little nuggets of original information. Many of us did not know that FORSYTH, Alexander John, M.A., was the "discoverer of the percussion principle," for which his chronicler admires him exceedingly and speaks with contempt of those who called his experiment rubbish. "That 'rubbish,'" says Mr. Maunder indignantly,

consisted of beautiful and ingenious applications of the percussion principle; a principle which, now after nearly half a century has elapsed, is partially, and will soon be generally, used in the British Army, as it has long been in the armies of our continental neighbours.

When I acted in "Henry V," in my school theatricals, and the list of the slain was brought to the King (me) after the battle of Agincourt, they included: "Edward the Duke of York, the Earl of Suffolk, Sir Richard Ketly, Davy Gam, esquire."

I had never taken much interest in "Davy Gam, esquire," until more than thirty years later, when I encountered him as an authentic person and rather fine fellow, in the Maunder biography:

GAM, David, a native of Wales, and an officer in the army of Henry V. Having returned from reconnoitring the enemy on the evening preceding the battle of Agincourt, he reported that there were enough of the enemy to be killed, enough to be taken prisoners and enough to run away. He was killed defending his sovereign, who was exposed to imminent danger, and was knighted by him on the field.

In my youthful days, also, tormented by fables, I should have been not too sorry to learn how Æsop met his death:

Being sent to Delphi with an offering, he so irritated the people by his censures on their manners, that they threw him from the top of a high rock.

Definitely proving that it is never a good thing to censure people's manners, when there is a high rock handy.

Another pleasant literary association nudged my memory, when I came across the name of "MACARTNEY, George, Earl of." You remember when Fanny, the prim little heroine of "Mansfield Park," is visited in her sitting-room by Edmund whom she loves; and how he utterly wrecks her peace of mind and her hopes of happiness by telling her that he has decided to act in the family private theatricals, after all, for the sake of playing a love-scene with the girl he loves. "'And now,

dear Fanny, I will not interrupt you any longer. You want to be reading. . . . *You* in the meanwhile will be taking a trip into China, I suppose. How does Lord Macartney go on?— (opening a volume on the table and then taking up some others). . . . as soon as I am gone, you will empty your head of all this nonsense of acting, and sit comfortably down to your table.’” Thoughtful and imaginative Edmund! Fanny did not throw the volume of Macartney, George, Earl of, at his head. I have never understood why.

One can be sure that Samuel Maunder on the subject of modern dictators would have had many a sagacious comment. He is, indeed, a head-wagger by nature. He wags his head over Napoleon:

In giving this sketch of Napoleon’s life, we have somewhat exceeded our usual limits; and it is neither our purpose nor our wish to make a single comment on his character as a man. His wondrous deeds will long afford matter for deep reflection; and while some may be dazzled by his amazing military talents and stupendous achievements, others will turn from them with sickening disgust.

And he wags it over Oliver Cromwell:

Suffice it, therefore, for us to say, that in his case, as in all other cases, great power ill-obtained was fatal to his happiness as an individual.

And with a flourish of reprimand, he puts Sir Francis Burdett in his place:

We feel bound, however reluctantly, to say that the absurd turbulence of Sir Francis Burdett’s earlier years seemed to spring from a restless vanity, and an eager craving after mob applause; while his departure, at a very advanced period of life, from the party of which till then he had for nearly two score years been the avowed

champion, savoured less of true and high conservative feeling, than it did of petulant vanity.

Samuel Maunder has his favourites, and John Mitford, "a miscellaneous writer," is one of them:

His versatility was such, that it was a matter of little consequence to him whether his theme were grave or gay . . . thus we find him editing the *Scourge* and *Bon Ton* Magazines, and other works of a similar cast, while he edified the world by his contributions to religious periodicals, or charmed it by those lyric effusions, which were graced by the classic typography of a St. Giles's press, and rendered popular by the sweet voices of itinerant vocalists.

Though even Mitford is not such a favourite as Cobbett, who is allowed more space than anyone else in the volume; several pages of really interesting biography lead us (and Samuel) to this melancholy conclusion:

Having so much exceeded our usual limits in the preceding sketch of the life of William Cobbett, we plead, as our excuse, the valuable example it affords (to youth especially) of what may be effected by early rising, habitual temperance, and unrelaxing industry.

But if Cobbett is Mr. Maunder's white-headed boy, my own vote goes to a certain Christian Henry Heinecken, who

spoke fluently at ten months old; at twelve he could recite the principal facts in the Pentateuch; in two months more he was master of the entire history of the Old and New Testaments; at two years and a half, he answered the principal questions in geography, and in ancient and modern history; and he spoke Latin and French with great facility before he had reached his fourth year. His constitution was so delicate, that he was not weaned till a few months before his death. He died in his fifth year, and on his death-bed displayed the utmost firmness and resignation.

Oddly enough, Maunder liked Swedenborg, and is not too hard on Swift. But Voltaire came in for a nasty crack:

He had stupendous talents, but there were a great many parts of his character by no means great or estimable.

And now, for another contrasting effect, let us place his estimate of Maria Louisa, Napoleon's second wife, side by side with two columns praising one Sarah Martin; and comparing them, realise that the reward of a pure spirit is to be appreciated by an equally pure spirit; and that Queenship and Beauty, madam, are not enough to eradicate from the pages of posterity a severe estimate of your lack of worth and high principle:

Maria Louisa was endowed with considerable talents . . . but the impartial biographer must still charge her with a selfishness of character and coldness of heart, which the difficulties of her position may perhaps extenuate, but cannot justify.

And Sarah Martin:

Such unremitting labours of love proved too severe for a constitution naturally delicate, and, after a few weeks of poignant suffering, her pure spirit passed to its reward October 12, 1843. She was buried in the churchyard of Caistre, where a simple monument records her name. Her small volume of posthumous poems, many of which breathe the true poetic spirit, will always be perused with interest.

It may or may not be my fancy that as we progress through the pages from A to Z, the biographer squeezes in more and more of his own unctuous personality. Nothing can perforate the smooth silky syrup of his self-esteem. When, however, he is dealing with any figure, political or aristocratic, of more

or less his own times, he recedes from the dangers of comment, and becomes discretion itself: Thomas Drummond, Undersecretary of State for Ireland, died only eleven years before this dictionary was published. His was apparently

As difficult a post, from circumstances to which we need not allude, as any in the whole range of our civil service.

I will leave you to discover for yourselves a final object-lesson of the snags and pitfalls which beset the prophetic chronicler, from the following entry:

BURNETT, James, Lord Monboddo . . . Though both learned and acute, he exposed himself to much ridicule by . . . ridiculous theories, particularly his whimsical speculations relative to a supposed affinity between the human race and the monkey tribe. Born 1714; died 1779.

Samuel Maunder published these awe-inspiring remarks in 1851, while in 1859 Darwin published *The Origin of Species*.

We cannot be free from a suspicion that while reprehending profligacy and licentiousness, Mr. Samuel Maunder enjoyed rolling these words from his pen, and took delight in collecting what he deemed were shocking instances of vice. Yet, although the word "profligacy" recurs again and again throughout the eight hundred and ninety-six pages of his book, I doubt if he really had any clear idea of what it meant.

We have most of us had our Maunder moods where we have reprehended profligacy and licentiousness. I remember a charming old naval man who once stayed with us in a cottage in the country for several months; he had all the best qualities of a long-term visitor; he was grateful, simple, affectionate, sensitive on our behalf as well as on his own (very

rare); unexacting and full of entertainment. (*Crossword clue*: A sailor at the distaff? 8,5. *Answer*: Spinning yarns.) But he had one fault, from Mr. Maunder's point of view, and even from ours: towards three o'clock in the morning he had to be picked out of the fireplace where he had fallen among the ashes, and had to be carried upstairs to bed by the servants, a good-natured couple who made it their rule to come down and look for him every night about this time. During one week-end, a friend came to stay with me who was herself a gay profligate with passionately serious interludes; one of these interludes occurred when she first had to hear why our other guest was still sleeping it off late that Saturday afternoon. Not only did she vow that never again would she herself touch a drop of wine or spirits, but her eloquence persuaded me to fetch upstairs every bottle of rum, gin and whisky I could find in the cottage, and to assist her in pouring the contents out of my bedroom window. For Loraine believed in doing things thoroughly. This moral story is twisted into irony by its farcical touch, as is the case with most moral stories; for the room where the profligate was "sleeping it off" had been built out from the rest of the cottage; and its thin corrugated iron roof, jutting out just below my window, received the heavy shower of rum and his other favourite tipples. "There!" exclaimed Loraine, satisfied, when every bottle was empty, that here was a good deed well if impulsively carried to its finish. "The darlin' old sinner!"

It is a fact and no exaggeration that the darlin' old sinner really was the only person in the cottage to think it had been raining that afternoon. When he made this innocent comment, I nearly wept. Though my tears were as unnecessary as Loraine's bold manoeuvres; for all he had to do when he discovered his loss was to send the servants, who adored him,

to fetch some more. And so he continued to lie blissfully among the ashes of the fire or under the crazy corrugated roof, in the Land where it is always *Mañana*.

"Come to the Land where it is always *Mañana*" was the exact wording of a travel advertisement, in the old days before no land was *mañana* at all. *Mañana*, I gathered, was the Spanish for "tomorrow." But even then it struck me that the land where it is *always* *Mañana* might prove a bit monotonous (no better, in fact, than the land where it is always yesterday) and might develop in time into a land where it is always prunes and custard, and no more alluring than that; unless, indeed, "M" in the advertisement was a misprint for "B": "Come to the land where it is always *Banana*!" Meaning, come to Lotus Land, to the Happy Isles, to Avalon and Nirvana, to the Never-never Land, to the land where Wednesday Fortnight Never Comes.

The land of advertisement itself is frequently for me a sort of Lotus Land where I can browse and be happy (browsing on lotuses may be a mixed metaphor, but then on the other hand it may not).

"Wanted: Four High-class Black Faced Nuns. 22 s."

"PAPER ECONOMY LABELS. For repeated use of old envelopes. Supplied to Royal Households, Bishops (16), Titled Families. 250 for 3/6; 500 for 6/-; 1,000 for 10/-. Post free. Cash with order. Much the best type of label I have seen—a Guards Officer. . . ."

When my novel "*Debonair*" was dramatised and produced at the Lyric Theatre, the producer went a little wild in his search for a young actress exactly fitted to play the leading rôle; and as time was getting short and auditions were getting longer every day, he conceived the idea of making a star instead of looking for a star already made. Impulsively, there-

fore, he inserted an advertisement in a theatrical paper, which he worded as follows:

"Young actress required immediately to play lead in West End London Theatre. *Biggest ingénue part since Hamlet.*"

The italics are mine. Nor have I ever ceased to be perplexed as to what exactly he meant by that rash description. The result was naturally to pack Shaftesbury Avenue from end to end the next day, so that you could not slide a pin amongst the young actresses who thought they were perfectly equipped to play the "biggest ingénue part since Hamlet."

"Lady with beautiful little daughter, aged four and a half, wishes to meet other lady similarly situated."

"Similarly situated." Such happy phrasing makes one sorrowful that one will never know the outcome of the advertisement. Was there another lady with an equally beautiful little daughter aged four and a half, in all the British Isles? And if so, what may the beautiful little daughters aged four and a half think of each other by the time they are twenty-four and a half?

"Beautiful daughter. Young goddess. Two sons. Young gods. By Jove, I wish I were coming too! And the wine. Fit for gods. Nectar, that's what I always say. Nectar. By Jove, you'll have the time of your life!"

I did not have the time of my life, for I felt that the whole affair with its tradition of Mount Olympus and so forth might prove more than I could manage. It was about 1928 when this most extraordinary proposition was made to coax me into going to stay at one of the most famous wine châteaux in France, and then to write a novel using it as a background. The suggestion came over the telephone from a total stranger while I was sitting in a flat in Knightsbridge washing my

hair. A voice which was at once beefy and throttled asked for the eminent novelist. The eminent novelist replied with dignity that she it was. The voice then introduced itself as a major in the army, as yet personally unacquainted with the eminent novelist, but he had at that moment five copies of her "Bouquet" in front of him on his desk and had distributed at least fifty more of this book of her travels through the wine country of France. "That," said the eminent novelist, her hair streaming water, "is definitely the stuff to give the troops." (By that time, I was beginning to wonder a little!) He then said that if I could spare a few moments to come along and visit him at his Mayfair flat and hear something to my advantage, he would do himself the honour of sending his car to fetch me. "No, you don't," said I, though not aloud. "White slave traffic!" Though, mind you, I was a bit old for it even in 1928. Perhaps he sensed the unspoken thought, for he added that naturally his sister would be in the flat with him. I liked that "naturally," and rejoined that naturally I would bring my friend with me. I then at his earnest request named an hour, giving myself time to dry my hair. And punctually to the moment his car arrived. We had pictured something a bit showy and ramshackle. On the contrary, it was the most beautiful car in which I have ever been driven: a large streamlined Rolls in pale buff, and for the comfort of the occupants two vast deeply upholstered buff suède armchairs, and a pale buff rug. We were separated from the chauffeur by a heavy plate-glass window, so that we were free to speculate on the owner, who we now hoped, encouraged not only by the luxury but by the good taste of the whole turnout, might, so to speak, match his car. ("I have papered my bathroom in dark red because I have somber tastes," so said Bernard in "The Young Visitors.")

The flat in Mayfair was just as distinguished as the car. We

were received by a charming young lady with cowslip hair, his secretary. Presently the owner of the car and the voice and the flat in Mayfair entered and made us welcome—(we never saw the sister, by the way). He was, as you may have supposed by now, lean, elegant and fastidious; a man of breeding and appearance; clothed by Savile Row. Well, no: as a matter of fact he was fat and scarlet, wearing loud checks and no collar because he had a boil on his neck; not the type from whom one would have expected a startlingly original and almost lunatic proposal. It oozed out of him gradually, but here were the main features: He had a great friend, a titled Frenchman, who owned a famous old château with an even more famous vineyard in the Bordeaux country. He wished to arrange a rather special compliment for this friend's birthday (or it might be Christmas or St. Valentine's Day), something a bit superior to a card, a tie or half a dozen handkerchiefs. Then he happened to read "Bouquet," and conceived the brilliant idea to which apparently Monsieur le Comte had already agreed, although the final outcome was to be a surprise to him: that I should go and stay there for a month, absorb the historic atmosphere and beauty of the place, and then, as I said before, write a novel using it as a setting.

This novel would be dedicated by the major to the French count.

The major went on to say: "I'm a plain business man, no hanky-panky. I'm prepared to pay for it now." He pulled a cheque-book out of his pocket. "One hundred pounds? Two hundred pounds? Don't mind telling me. What's your usual charge?"

"What's my charge for what?" I asked gently.

"For the book, of course."

Have any of you ever used the expression, "Words failed

me"? If so, you will understand and forgive me, because I have to use it now. Words failed me when I realised that I could not rise and leave that flat in Mayfair without explaining to the gentleman all about publishers, all about literary agents, all about contracts, all about advances and royalties, all about printing and binding, all, indeed, about everything, including the exact nature of a dedication which was usually supposed to be from the author to someone else.

The major was deeply disappointed and even hurt when a little of this fog had been cleared up. But still he clung tenaciously to his idea; and he remained still very anxious to write me a cheque for a hundred pounds. Resisting this preliminary offer, I drank a glass of excellent sherry and persuaded him to go and see my agent and discuss the matter with him. Then I made another swift and silky transit from Mayfair back to Knightsbridge in the sumptuous buff Rolls, and had a kipper to my tea and was glad to find that my hair was quite dry by now.

I was not altogether against what might surely have been an interesting and unusual experience: of staying for a month with an old French family in a fifteenth-century castle with a famous vineyard; only I stipulated that not I alone, but the original quartette who did the wine-tour of France which provided the material for "Bouquet" should be invited to stay at the château. As for the business side, my agent, incredible though it may seem, succeeded in reducing it to some sort of sense. I had just finished a novel, and had a clear space ahead of me; and we all thought that the visit might be fun, though we had our doubts as to the young goddess and the young gods. Our theory was that the major wanted to marry the young goddess, and that the book was a sort of wooing by proxy to propitiate a strict French father.

This theory was encouraged a few days later by an aston-

ishing development which gave us great pleasure, though it killed the goose that was to have laid the golden eggs. The major had been to see my agent again in a state of outraged daintiness: he had just read another book of mine, about dogs, called "The Dark Gentleman." He thought it *dreadfully* indelicate. It shocked him profoundly. Therefore when I wrote the novel with the château for its setting, he, the major, must be allowed to vet it before I sent it to my publishers, just to make sure that there should not be one single line in it as crude and outspoken as those which had quivered through his being from end to end when he read "The Dark Gentleman."

I never saw the major again.

Glancing through my rough notes on wine, notes which I have been accumulating for several years, I discovered (not unnaturally, considering this was 1940) that wherever I had made a note for the sake of its underlying fun or its interest, the chief reaction now was nostalgia. "It Never Can Happen Again" was, I believe, the title of a book by William De Morgan in which two sisters, twins, got accidentally separated and spent years trying to obtain each other's present address, till they met again when they were ninety. This quaint old-fashioned tale seems at the present moment so acutely realistic, topical, and likely to happen to any of us that I can hardly bear to think of it.

It never can happen again . . . that I shall describe a lunch at a quayside restaurant in Toulon without feeling that Toulon has no more bitter associations than that lunch or that old joke about French sailors' trousers. It never can happen again that I shall remember a month of delight over pictures and prowling and wine in Munich, without remembering

that Munich too is a town which for us has gathered a meaning somewhat less picturesque and delicious.

Because it was Humphrey's birthday, and Humphrey had been one of our original four to go on the tour of French vineyards in 1926, we hoped to find a specially good restaurant in which to celebrate reunion, ten years later. We drove along from Le Lavandou, twisting in and out of the little French Mediterranean villages in a brilliant blue day but with a bitter wind; and stopped on the farther side of Toulon at a restaurant where we had been warmly recommended. But a hilarious Provençal wedding-feast was in progress, and we should have been either drawn in or crushed up out of it into one corner; so we wandered along the coast road until we arrived by chance at a perfect little restaurant with a verandah jutting out over the sea, protected from the wind. No one there except ourselves and the proprietor with moustaches like Hercule Poirot, yearning to give us as much of his full attention as the Ancient Mariner gave to the wedding-guest. Yes, and he loved wine, that man, and so did his waiter, a gay little fellow who had just won fifty francs in a lottery and simply danced up and down the boarded floors. While we were supping our Chambéry Vermouth, Monsieur held forth to us eloquently: "On voit que vous êtes des amateurs de vin." I was just preparing to be offended when I saw Rosemary, whose French was far superior to mine, sleeking and purring at the compliment, and so I realised for the first time that "amateur" in the original French meant "lover," and not, as in the present English use of the word, someone slightly drivelling and incompetent. "It is the guests who make the wine," Monsieur went on to say, after he had warned us never to be satisfied with the sight of cobwebs on the bottle, for cobwebs can very easily be arranged by the dishonest. "It is the guests who make the wine." And he chattered with scorn about clients who

liked their Burgundy well iced before serving (he joked about "the ladies," of course, but Rosemary and I were wearily used to that). Then from his own cellar he brought up a sensationally excellent wine of Alsace; and to follow, a 1923 Red Hermitage. Alsatian wines are literally not to be sneezed at, and I took to them seriously at the time when I said a rueful goodbye to Moselle.

I can recall a very good pâté at our Toulon lunch; and it was fun while we ate it, to watch the *langoustes* being drawn out of their tanks far below. But on the whole, memory of food does not last as long as the memory of good wines, which though fugitive, are as lovely, while they last, as great poems, so you would not wish me meekly to apologise for not crossing them out from these chronicles.

William of Wykeham (was it?) wrote:

*Eight hours for work; for soothing slumber seven;
Nine to the world devote, and all to Heaven.*

He did not mention eating and drinking, but a gourmand (*not* a gourmet) friend of mine suggested that these are what he meant by "Nine to the world devote, and all to Heaven" (the very same man in a long-ago moment of uplift and sadness told me that "for me, life can know neither pleasure nor pain any more"—while his mouth was full of plovers' eggs and he had just ordered another basketful).

At this stage I want to have my say about broad beans, which of course ought to be eaten while they are still practically unborn and well below the age of consent—the gardener's consent; gardeners like us to wait for our broad beans till they are the size of a prize-fighter's fist with great whacking leathery khaki suits on them. I once knew an American woman who wrote what she called a "Cookbook";

and in the cookbook she says the English serve their broad beans so old that in America they "*would not be socially acceptable.*" But our little broad beans, our lyrical darlings—why, their soft pastel pinks and greens would make an ogre cry at the sight of them.

With few exceptions, the attitude which any hotel and restaurant proprietor in England used to display towards any request for a bottle of wine, remained uneasy and puritanical in origin, especially in most country inns and hotels, and even more especially and mysteriously in seaside hotels. They would receive orders for beer, for cider, for cocktails or a whisky-and-soda with a sort of jolly bonhomie; but should you ask for wine they reacted oddly; a blight fell upon their manner; they became apathetic or haughty, according to temperament; they turned away the head, their whole demeanour indicating that they did not "hold with wine"—which to them was apparently still associated with all that is voluptuous and bacchanalian and wicked . . . and next thing, you'll be dancing down the 'ill singing, with vine-leaves in your 'air.

And yet once upon a time wine was drunk in England, claret principally. Our native taste has always been for dry wines, though this insistence upon *sec* was frequently (and unfairly) deemed an affectation. Why, even history concurs that we preferably sacrificed a *sweet* wine to drown that sweet prince, Clarence.

But these bottles which appeared reluctantly on the table if specially asked for, in practically any English country or provincial hotel and restaurant! They had "CHABLIS" or "BEAUNE" or "BORDEAUX" on the label in large letters, which stared at you; and you stared, too, but you could not answer back. They had no vintner, no date, no "Clos" or "Château," no ancestry; for they were unmistakably CHABBLY—BONE—BAWDOE.

In the old lighthearted prewar days when it did not matter that your sense of proportion was lopsided and foolish, and your pleasure in sophistication even more gaily lopsided and foolish, you could enjoy feeling that slow gathering of your inner eloquence which happened when you were looking in silence at a wine-list, ready to comment on the fact that none of your favourite vintages figured in it, and a rather officious sommelier, misunderstanding your silence, was liable to come prancing up to inform you tolerantly that there were two kinds of wine, red and white. Or by confiding in a kindred soul about that little hotel in Provence where bouillabaisse was especially good because the saffron was fresh, not powdered: you could tell the difference by the actual stamens and pistils floating about like drowned maidens' hair. "Comes from Spain," said my nonchalant rough note; "costs 450 the tin and 1300 the kilo." Francs, I suppose.

But why, in this old packet of wine notes, I should suddenly have come across an ecstatic splutter on the subject of Virginia Ham, remains a mystery:

"VIRGINIA HAM rolled and stuffed inside with cloves and honey and bay leaf, to season it. Cured in hickory wood. Hogs clean-fed of acorn, bran, and peanuts just before slaughter."

I know, of course, when I made that note: it was in Santa Monica while I was working for a Hollywood studio early in 1933. Our Kentucky chauffeur sent for this ham from the South. I seem to have left out that succulent cliché, "peach-fed."

These, too, were in the same packet:

"Of brandy in tulip glasses

"I always give people good 1865 brandy at the bottom of those vast glasses, because then however much you give them

it looks only a little, so you can give them *really* only a little.' ” (I trust that the second set of inverted commas convey that I am quoting the expedient of someone else, and not of myself.)

“Of G. W.’s *whisky*

“G. W.’s story of the double casks of Irish whisky. Ordered 24-gallon cask, but a huge 48-gallon arrived, too big for cellar. Debate of conscience as to whether he should let them know of their mistake. Consulted friend, who told him not to worry till he got inside; for since days when Wellington complained that his 24-gallon casks got tapped on the way and arrived half empty, they had always placed one small barrel within a much bigger one, to fool tappers.

“Of *Hosts and Guests*

“Wine is one of the few things which are able to kill polite lies between Host and Guest. When a host says, ‘How do you like this?’ the guest need not say, ‘Delicious, delicious!’ as he is supposed to over ‘Is your bed comfortable?’ or ‘Do you like our house (or our child)?’ Over drink it is permitted to say: ‘Well, as a matter of fact, it isn’t quite . . .’

“But I still remember my uncle’s horror, when I took him to lunch one day with some friends of mine whom he did not know very well. They wanted my opinion of a Liebfraumilch that they had got from a new wine-merchant. I tried it, and said: ‘This isn’t Liebfraumilch at all. You’ve been done. I’m not sure, but I *think* it’s a sparkling St. Péray.’ And he rushed in with formal apologies on my behalf and even, I believe, went so far as to say: ‘She’s only a child!’ I was roughly about thirty-five at the time.

"Of Budapest Headwaiter

"Met what had once been the headwaiter of biggest hotel in Budapest, now American publisher's butler in White Plains, near New York. Greeted each other tearfully. Both homesick talking of the Danube, and of the special brandy, which he had then recommended, with the strange rough husky breath of peaches in it. (Peach-fed—unlike that Virginia ham!)

"Of Wine in Munich

"One of the proudest moments of my life, only comparable to that of any renowned soaker marching into his favourite pub and demanding a glass of water, was my entrance on one occasion into the restaurant of our hotel at Munich, where they had an excellent wine-list, so that for two or three weeks my companions and I steadily experimented, mostly on unknown wine. But on this particular evening we were all suffering from reaction. We had had *Gänsleber-pastete* for lunch, the famous German equivalent for *pâté de foie gras*—slices of delicate pink and mouse-coloured velvet, and with it, after hovering uncertainly for some time over an Erdener Herrenberg, a most delicious Moselle, we finally decided on Liebfraumilch, 1921. Our jocund wine-waiter explained to us that this particular vintage was christened throughout Bavaria, 'Widows' wine,' for it was so potent and enlivening to the spirit of gallantry, that whenever men drank it they died within a year, vowing merrily that such a year had been worth it. And then we visited the lovely little summer palace at Nymphenburg: a miniature rococo reverie of crystal and mirrors and glass.

"So by the evening we sat down rather cross and tired, and ordered mineral water. Then followed the proud moment. I

never dreamed of such a reputation. At first the waiters were incredulous; they rushed about exclaiming: 'What! No wine for the gracious lady? It is not possible!' The news spread: 'The gracious, the high-well-born is not drinking wine to-night. She has asked for water!' A crescendo of consternation. The headwaiter himself appeared, godlike, reproachful. 'Is it true that the gracious high-well-born has asked for water with her meal? It is the first time since her arrival.' "

But that was Munich in 1928. "That was Mose," we remark drily, when someone in the same room with us has just answered the telephone: "Hello, Mose! Is that you, Mose? Now look here, Mose. Mose, you don't say! I'll be with you in half an hour, Mose."

That was Mose. And so, softly and ruefully: That was Munich.

A note on Paris, in the same year, 1928:

"Have discovered in Paris a little paradise of chauffeurs. It only contains about seven or eight tables on a wooden floor, and a bar behind the glass screen. There I have eaten a Châteaubriant so tender that it fell apart when you breathed on it. I always enjoy ordering a Châteaubriant, in memory of the dear old waiter with white whiskers at St. Raphael, who first taught me the worldly paradox that you must ask for it 'blue' if you want it 'rouge.' With this special Châteaubriant at the 'paradis des Chauffeurs,' I drank Fleury St. Galmier of 1918, a Burgundy as soft as silk, at ten francs the bottle, roughly one-and-eight. '*Pommes frites*,' of course; and after that, a dish of *petits pois*; and after that, cream cheese, irresistible when you beat it up yourself with a mound of fresh cream and sprinkle it with sugar. After that, coffee; after that, the bill: twenty-seven francs—four-and-six for the two of us, including the St. Galmier and the coffee and tip. Can you blame the chauffeurs that every day their Rolls-Royces

and Cadillacs champ in a long line outside this humble little café? I have liked it a trifle better than my second favourite among the cheap little restaurants of Paris, where all meals were eaten outside, under a striped canopy, where the blue trout and the *champignons sautés* are specially succulent, and you can drink a dry Vouvray *en carafe*. Vouvray is to me a typical wine of the Edwardian era; it is so lighthearted and insouciant. It is a gay little giddy-little, little-French-dancer wine."

And that was Paris, that was Munich, that, again was Mose.

I have been told with some severity that quotation is a form of cheating and, if you have anything to say, you should yourself be capable of finding words by which to say it. But why waste time struggling to be original, supposing a poet has already found perfect expression for what happens in a time of crisis when all thoughts rush together to make one thought? And when, as now, we are all wondering just what is this hard persistent love for our wave-beaten land, how can I restrain myself from quoting those lines that Ford Madox Hueffer wrote in the 1.10 train from Cardiff (does it still run, I wonder?) when, after his leave was over, he was on his way back to France in the last war.

What is love of one's land? . . .

I don't know very well

It is something that sleeps

For a year—for a day—

For a month—something that keeps

Very hidden and quiet and still

And then takes

The quiet heart like a wave

The quiet brain like a spell,

*The quiet will
Like a tornado; and that shakes
The whole of the soul.*

This job of loving England can in its present working out have little to do with romantic contemplation; it calls for a quality which remains steady and unbewildered among a clatter of the most shattering events; the elimination of any idea of warm thrills and tremors of heroism, and of that human desire which will keep on raising its head: to be seen as a Cool and Dauntless Figure in the hour of danger. Requirements which are as difficult to fulfil as the list so lightly drawn up in Kipling's "If—": "If you can keep your head when all about you Are losing theirs and blaming it on you." (It's the "blaming-it-on-you" part of it which gets most of us down.) A quality well realised in that child whom we met when we were ourselves children in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass, and whom we later recognised as being the English character brought to perfection. No nightmare could ever disturb Alice's fundamental serenity nor startle her good-tempered acceptance of fact and anti-fact. She might suddenly shoot up too high to pass through the tiny door, or dwindle so small that she could not reach up to the table on which lay the key, but whatever Alice did, she never panicked; she never rushed about and asked foolish questions; she never lost her sense of proportion. Once, certainly, she cried a pool of tears and slipped into it, but chided herself sternly for such a lapse: "'I wish I hadn't cried so much!'" said Alice, as she swam about, trying to find her way out. 'I shall be punished for it now, I suppose, by being drowned in my own tears! That *will* be a queer thing, to be sure! However, everything is queer today.'

"I have heard it said on unimpeachable authority (another of those phrases I have always wanted an

excuse for using) that on the eve of his tragic speech to England in September 1938, just before the summons to Munich brought a year's respite, Mr. Chamberlain tossed and turned and could not get a wink of sleep. At last he looked at the time and exclaimed: "Four o'clock? Dear me, this will never do." And forthwith he turned over and slept until he was called.

"Dear me, this will never do."

"That *will* be a queer thing, to be sure."

Why did I feel the need to pair off these two remarks? It must be that I was impressed by the same quality in both, of resolute cheerfulness without swearing.

Patriotism is love of your country *in* your country, and you can shout it aloud; but nostalgia is love of your country quickened with an unbearable longing. Nostalgia for England means that you ache for the sound of English voices; for the English indolent good-temper; the English capacity to take disaster with a slow chuckle and a comedy line; a sort of down-to-earth tradition which startlingly wings off when you least expect it, into the wildest flights of endeavour and endurance; the English suspicion of oratory combined with appreciation of a fine gesture, especially when the gesture is performed, so to speak, without gesticulating; the English sense of fairness which refuses to bestow blame unless absolutely satisfied whether and where blame can be bestowed. I once complained to the woman who supplied my newspapers that for three mornings running they had sent the wrong papers; she said: "Ow, that's my sister. You can't blame anyone."

*And thro' the square
Of glass*

*At my elbow, as limpid as air,
I watch our England pass . . .*

.
*For it is for the sake of the wolds and the wealds
 And for the sake of the quiet fields
 And the path through the stackyard gate . . .
 That these may be inviolate,
 And know no tread save those of the herds and the hinds,
 And that the south-west winds
 Blow on no forehead save of those that toil
 On our suave and hallowed soil.
 And that deep peace may rest
 Upon that quiet breast . . .*

So we think of our special little patches of English shore and country, with memory tilted to catch the light of enchantment.

Two fields, one light brown and one dark brown earth on a slope of hill fanwise against the sky in the plain colours of afternoon; not even a horse nor a ploughman in sight; no trees; just the road and the two fields lying quietly one above the other. "England," you say to yourself in a quick whisper.

The river at early morning, parting at either side of the island just below the weir where it pours over in a silver horse-shoe; the wind fidgets through the trees; small water-fowl make little quick plops and stirrings before they plunge, and shudder onto the water. And then suddenly, a sound to set the heart thumping, you hear the strong beat of wings coming nearer and nearer: the swans are flying upstream. At evening, the swan does not fly; he swims slowly at the point of a silver arrowhead which he drags in his wake.

In the Cotswolds, in early March. Beside the looping stream coloured like bright steel, two glossy ponies throw their black

shadows on to the stone wall behind them. The shapely willow-tassels among the bare twigs are gilded by streams of pale sunshine. A robin is singing on a bare, shadowed tree, the field in front of him lit saffron by the evening sun. When he swoops out of the shadow on a slant straight into the shafts of gold, they strike his breast with such a vivid scarlet that you have to cry out, "Look—did you see, did you *see*?" even though you know that your companion has seen as much as yourself. Then the brilliance fades from the hilltop road and from the gaps behind and between bare woods. They are misty now, like the mist on a plum not yet fully ripe. At least a dozen rabbits skip out and play at ease round a tree on the rough park land. That night we sat on the window-seat of the sitting-room at the inn, and heard the hard metallic sound of hoofs. Someone called from the doorway downstairs: "Did you have a good day?" Someone else called, "Crowder!"—a dim silhouette on horseback, pink coat and white breeks. "Crowder!" Then four horsemen and all the pack wheel past the inn and up the road, sparks clattering from the hoofs, and a horn calling the hounds to heel, fainter and then gone.

Somewhere in England, the name deleted as though this half-page of memory had been through the censor's office, I saw a wuffle of elephant-grey clouds, and the dark moorland hills under them turning gradually luminous, pale fawn and light green, as the shadows raced on. And behind them, that vague pencilling of farther hills which always so strangely excites the imagination.

My first glimpse of Buckler's Hard, down in the New Forest; two rows of Georgian cottages, mellow with that sturdily independent air of their period, and between them the broad road running down to the Estuary where Nelson's ships had been built; wide enough for the carts to come jolting along with a spread of great tree-logs on either side; good timber

with which to build Nelson's ships; the *Agamemnon*; the *Garland*; the *Brilliant*.

Bridlepath to Pleshey. Dragon Hill on the quiet Berkshire Downs near Brambleford, where St. George was said to have fought the fire-breathing monster, long ago. The silvery confusion of estuary and island and land, going up the Thames by Sheerness and Shoeburyness. And the estuary at Orford in Suffolk, with its racing white sails. And the Crescent curving gracefully, sedately above Bath. And the spire of Ely seen across the fens "from the other side." (People will always tell you, "Oh, but you should have approached Ely from the *other* side!" Yet it is good enough from all sides.) And a Cornish cove, light green water sparkling into pools and lagoons among the sheltering serpentine rock, and the fresh salty tang of pink sea-thrift growing into cushions on the seawall. A signpost in Norfolk fallen forward onto its face in the reeds, but the words just decipherable on one arm, "To the Ferry"—helpfully pointing downwards towards the Styx. Lyme Regis and Jane Austen; the moors and Emily Brontë; the Sussex Downs and Kipling; we have only to think of England and we see it peopled: Nelson, and St. George, and the huntsman, and the ferryman, and the sister of the woman at the newspaper kiosk; Little John in Sherwood and Fair Rosamond in her Maze.

Miss Matty in Cranford, and Elaine at Astolat, and Alice in Wonderland, and Rosalind in Arden. It helps, if you are homesick, to write the beloved name and say it. But you can imagine him, at the Mermaid Tavern in London, comforting himself by writing the beloved name over and over again: "Well, this is the Forest of Arden. Ay, now am I in Arden."

Stevenson in the South Seas, thirsting for Scotland, writes to Crockett:

*Blows the wind today, and the sun and the rain are flying,
Blows the wind on the moors today and now,
Where about the graves of the martyrs the whaups are crying,
My heart remembers how!*

And Yeats, wherever he was, heard lake-water lapping. And Rupert Brooke, homesick in Berlin, cried:

*God, I will rise and take a train,
And get me to England once again.*

Kipling, in his inspired intervals, wrote from the very core of nostalgia; wrote to twist our hearts into a knot, of the Kentish Weald and Sussex woods, of legends of English shipping and the Roman Wall and Elizabethan adventure; of wet soft English violets half hidden on ledges and dips where the steep cliff falls into more kindly slopes; "Violets from the under-cliff, wet with channel spray"—that would be the southeast, where a child digging castles in the sand would strike her wooden spade against nubbles of chalk. Along the cliff path ("Don't go too near the edge, Miss Gladys, it's right down dangerous") from Broadstairs to Ramsgate; and farther along, too far to walk, the Cinque Ports. How did that poem run, learnt at school and repeated in a monotonous sing-song because you can always chant a rhythmic list of names without attending to the sense: "Sweepers—Unity, Claribel, Assyrian, Stormcock . . ." No, those were the names of Kipling's "Mine Sweepers" in the old war which broke on us in 1914. Which older war was that? . . . You woke with a start, in the classroom, from daydreaming of the sands at

Broadstairs, to hear the literature mistress state that "cinque" was spelt to mean five in old French—

"Now get out your atlas, Gladys—don't just sit there—and look up the Cinque Ports. You'll find the sea has receded from Sandwich and Romney so that now the ships couldn't sail up as far."

In those days it was rare that during a poetry lesson we should make historical references or bring out geographical atlases; lessons were kept in fairly airtight compartments. And I made a disturbing discovery:

"But, Miss Brown, they're not in that order. Sandwich is the first to happen after Broadstairs, and then Dover, and Hythe next, and Hastings a long way round, and I can't find Romney at all."

"It's there if you look for it, Gladys; you know as well as I do that in poetry you have to consider the scansion. And Broadstairs is *not* a Cinque Port."

"Broadstairs is quite near the North Foreland," I remarked, dismissing scansion as a matter of little importance, though, Wegg-like, I had already at the age of nine dropped into poetry so bad as to be unbelievable a number of times. "We can hear it boom in the summer holidays when there's a fog."

"That's nice, isn't it?"—absently, for by now it was not I who had ceased to attend to Miss Brown, but Miss Brown who had ceased to attend to me.

I was a London child, and the rest of England, then, meant Broadstairs and the coast of Kent, as far as I was concerned. The coast of Kent has remained significant to me in spite of later passions for the coast of Hampshire, the coast of Suffolk, the coast of Cornwall, and the island of Skye. If only I had been born in a different part of London, south of the river, I

could have said wholly and with pride: "I am a man of Kent." Kipling would only have had to ask, nowadays: "How stands the Old Lord Warden?" and I would have rushed in with the impatient inquiry: "Are Dover's cliffs still white?" Because for so long we have been cut off from official knowledge of this, till suddenly on September 17, 1940, after a strangely weatherless year, came the sudden thrill of seeing the newspaper bulletin released into heavy leaded type:

DOVER STRAITS WEATHER

Strong S.W. wind, heavy sea, mist, visibility 4½.

For indeed, Wednesday Fortnight Always Comes, and it has come now, literally with a vengeance (curious when stock phrases become quick and supple with meaning). Since the invasion of the Low Countries, through May, June, July, August, September and on into the autumn and winter, we have been in the thick of Wednesday Fortnight; and the behaviour of the Straits of Dover, which for so many years gave qualms to those of us bad sailors who were going on holiday abroad, has swung right over to an opposite preoccupation; for, marvel of marvels, we rejoice on hearing that it is rough. And more than the foghorn of the North Foreland can be heard at Broadstairs. Events are happening on such a heroic scale that we only realise them in odd fragments, snatches and paragraphs.

Such as the little incident of a man who was bombed out of his home, but managed to save his alarm-clock so that he could be sure of not being late for work the next morning.

We respect the serenity (and the sonorous prose) of the mathematician who during the big nightly raids continued, unlike Uncle John, to look *too* well and rosy in the morning because, as he gravely said: "I sleep securely beneath the im-

pregnable ceiling of probability." As a mathematician he was sticking to his job, which was to believe not only with his brain but with his soul as well, in the unblinking law of averages; but our respect for him is nothing compared with what we feel for the man who managed to save his alarm-clock, nothing else, from beneath a ceiling which (let us face it, my mathematician) has not been all that impregnable.

One morning in May, 1940, long before it was time to get up, I distinctly heard a cuckoo call for a taxi eighty-one times. No doubt about it: "Ta-xi, ta-xi, ta-xi," on just those two persistent notes we have ourselves used so often when there was no commissionaire at the door. At lunch-time, a taxi drove up to this little Brambleford hotel. If a cuckoo had alighted, then I could have been sure the war was a dream.

Cuckoos are all very well, strictly rationed; but on the same evening, when we returned from a stroll round the lanes, a nightingale was singing on top of the barn almost opposite our own sitting-room: that careless bubbling of song, never so joyful as a blackbird nor so pure as a lark, but, as always, infinitely more thrilling than either. We could see it perched on top of the steep thatch, its tiny dark shape clear in a wash of moonlight which also brightened the wavy rose and dark-wine roofs farther along the road; an orchard, its trees widely spaced, was sunk in a flowery wilderness of cow-parsley and buttercups, a few yellow tulips round the boles. Two donkeys, homing in the orchard, exuded their gentle impartial charm on all who lingered beyond the low fence; the darker of the two, especially, had the anxious eyes of all donkeys, and that engaging suggestion of top-heaviness of every creature that has not yet been long in the world. Though colour everywhere was paler than by day, it had not yet been wholly

blotted out in luminous grey monotony. Unwilling to go indoors, we loitered up and down our road, saying we would wait until the nightingale stopped. The nightingale did not stop, but went on singing, indefatigable. It was the season of laburnums in bloom, and thick strong chestnut-trees, and clumps of purple flag-flowers among the vegetables in all the cottage gardens. Dusk dropped a veil over colour, and one star in a bluish grey chiffon sky looked like a bright speck imperfectly blacked-out. A plane passed overhead, the engine turned off, a silent ghost of a plane; and a bat flapped its wings as though in mimicry. It was so lovely out there, but at last we had to go in, nightingale or no nightingale, because it was two minutes to nine. It seemed a shame, but against that awful compulsion to hear the news, good or bad, beauty could not compete, nor the moonlight and the flag-flowers, the charming soft-eyed donkeys, the orchard with the buttercups and cow-parsley and tulips, the tinkle of running water, the mellow suggestion of rose-coloured, wine-coloured roofs and tiles, all things lovely.

We thought the nightingale could not compete either, but we were wrong. It sang on and on, a force of glorious passionate indifference, so that it could be heard through the wireless bulletin, which that night, as on so many other nights, was alternately splendid and horrible. Some of the briefly spoken unemotional sentences of the commentator might have been screams of pain, for all they could conceal of what lay behind them.

At last I switched off the wireless in the middle of an account by Our Special War-Correspondent in Belgium. In the lull which followed, that incredible nightingale swelled into a pæan of callous defiant rapture. Not that one expected it to be otherwise than callous; it would have been slightly unreasonable to reproach birds and donkeys and orchards for

not harmonising with the horror of the nine o'clock news. Perhaps, indeed, the nightingale did harmonise with some of its defiant splendour.

We went out again, and sauntered a little way up the road towards the clear curve of the Downs. It was past blacking-out time, and a comic pantomime was going on at one of the little houses where the family had had an idea that they could hang up their curtain more successfully from outside the window than from inside. The man stood outside with spread arms, and three women stood inside with hands gesticulating and catching at the curtain, now at one end and now at the other, as it perpetually fell down between them on to a clump of valerian growing beneath the window, against the wall. It was perhaps their jolly laughter that gave us the sensation that we were watching some incident of old robust kitchen harlequinade; especially as every time they thought it was triumphantly fixed, and every time the man was going indoors again to enjoy his bit of supper, that preposterous curtain once more flopped down.

Yet it was not so very funny, in spite of their good-humoured laughter, and in spite of the nightingale conquering the news, that a nice ordinary little family should have to occupy itself with meticulously shutting out a night of late spring. Not so very funny. Suddenly, without any visible connection, I thought of an unobtrusive paragraph I had recently read in the paper:

BELGIAN CABINET DECREE

A Cabinet meeting of Belgian Ministers held "Somewhere in France" yesterday (states Reuter) approved the text of two decrees, one of which states:—

In the name of the Belgian people, in pursuance of Article 32 of

the Constitution and in view of the fact that the King is in the power of the invader, the Ministers, met together in Council, declare that it is impossible for the King to reign.

Rarely have I felt such a surge of tenderness as for those men in mufti who were upholding by faith and loyalty Article 32 of the Constitution. All things were topsy-turvy in this war; costumes and trappings of high romance could no more compete with Article 32, than the news could compete with the eternal nightingale. Article 32 is the true and important thing, and presumably Articles 1 to 31 as well, only we shall probably never know what they are. We must believe in the things we cannot see: "That's the Pacific; it's bigger than the Atlantic. 'Yes, I can see that.'" The Englishman's cook will not perish; that respectful soul will survive as an example of faith, docility and imagination, who could say, "Lord, I believe," without having to add, as must so many of us today: "Help thou mine unbelief." Often it has occurred to me, in rebellious mood, that the sick child's father in St. Mark was contradicting himself; till by a flash of truth I was lately allowed to see that if you believe only enough to prompt you to cry for help in your unbelief, that is already belief beyond measure. "Lord, I believe"—but we are terrified that in a moment the flash will have gone.

Samuel Butler discovered: "Logic is like the sword—those who appeal to it shall perish by it. Faith is appealing to the living God, and one may perish by that too, but somehow one would rather perish that way than the other, and one has got to perish sooner or later." And into the prim official edict of the Belgian Government, into Article 32, was packed all the intense significance seen by that same flash of truth and forked lightning. Seen, and gone again. Why, at school,

did they throw mufflers and dust-sheets over such words as Civics and Government and the Articles of the Constitution, so that they did not come leaping up at you with a shout, with a gleam of spears, with the sparkle of a fountain in the sun? I believe the Pacific is bigger than the Atlantic; I believe in the man who rescued his alarm-clock; I believe in that acacia-tree with its white tassels seen across red cottage roofs, shaking with pure light against the pure blue sky; I believe (tenderly) in the announcement that Niagara is "contributing more water" towards our War Effort; I believe (more tenderly) in the French sailors at Martinique who were announced on the wireless as being in despair and growing long black beards as a protest; I believe (most tenderly) in the Ten Golfers of the Argentine who are prepared to adopt Ten Children of English Golfers; I believe that though Wednesday Fortnight has come, and though at any moment I may look my last on all things lovely, I am given a rare chance to look my first on all things lovely as well.

I began these chronicles of everything and nothing wondering how to end them, and hoping in the slack Micawberish way of authors that something would turn up—a clue, an incident, an abstract idea, a touch of symbolism, a significant happy phrase to supply the last sentence; I trusted to luck-in. And indeed, most thoughtfully, when I was within about twenty pages of what looked like the end of the book, my home in London received an incendiary bomb and everything was destroyed in a blaze.

This seemed, as a reply, prompt but a little too drastic.

Perhaps what is familiar has always meant too much to me. I fear strangeness; not strangers, but strangeness. Perhaps the correction, literally from heaven, may be salutary. My love of my own things was not hoarding, nor greed, nor even æsthetic

appreciation. I loved them because I *knew* them. The loss quickened my imagination: how must it feel to suffer strangeness of country as well, of language, of occupation—nostalgia which is puckering the hearts of half the world?

After I first heard about the fire, I remembered that it would be a good thing to take trouble out-of-doors. No live person had been hurt, so one's sense of proportion clearly indicated that there was no need to kick up a real fuss; it was just something that had happened—something not very amusing, certainly, but not tragedy.

Brambleford Common is bordered by a stream crossed in several places by rough plank bridges. When on this blowy morning of October I walked along the path that divided the grass into two green triangles, the leaves were lifting and falling in light glittering showers, not only on the grass and into the brooks, but up and around and all over the air; children out of school were running about on the same inconsequent errands as the leaves; the surrounding trees were lit up in a soft glory of copper and silver and pale gold. And I thought that nostalgia should be sent to the devil, for certainly it comes from the devil who likes to hear us bewail, "It will never be the same again," and who might, indeed, have wrapped us round for so long with pleasant things and rooms and places, so as to have the fun of goading us to say: "It will never be the same again."

Well—acceptance is no bad thing, either. It will never be the same again; but that can be said on a note of expectancy; it can be seen suddenly down a different slant.

I went out again after tea, up onto the downs this time. There was now no sunshine and little colour; a lark rose trilling into a quiet grey sky; a wave of land against it, high and unbroken; below, a slope of brown ploughed field; a compact group of farm buildings; a circular grove of beech trees

in a hollow, their vivid tints drained away by the unassuming afternoon; a ram with a bell on one horn moved about crossly among the silent herd. The whole scene was a tranquil statement of its own indubitable right to existence. Then a formation of four aeroplanes shot into view, tilting into alert rapid shapes, all beautiful, so that their leader could dive under and over and in front of them, but never to their discomposure.

"It can never be the same again"—but one could not go on repeating this on a muted note for more than half a day. Besides, it was time to go back, as I was expecting my house-keeper from London with news of the fire.

For, thank goodness, which we say too often not meaning it literally (but now, and goodness knows, I did mean it), no human being was in my rooms when it all happened. Agnes had a racy narrative to give us of the night's adventure, for she had run up and out from the shelter on hearing we had been struck, and mingled with the crowd below; the porters, the Fire Brigade, the A.R.P. wardens, were all doing their utmost to fight the flames.

When I was a horrid little girl, I won much credit by translating into English verses the fire part of Schiller's "*Das Lied von der Glocke*" for the German lesson. In crude laborious stanzas I praised the benison of fire that assists the cheerful crafts and domesticities, but then expressed the feelings of man when the raw power of fire leaps beyond control and destroys the beloved home. Schiller and I at opposite ends, nationally speaking, of the present conflagration, still feel pretty much the same about it.

Agnes was exhausted from her night's experiences; but her pungent comic London spirit was quite undefeated, though now and then sad little fragments and reactions turned up in her story as the archæologist's spade unwittingly turns up a battered coin: a funny collection to mourn, considering that

she, too, had lost the whole of her more important possessions: a collection which the censorious Italian used to describe as "Non e serio." But then, what *is* serious, nowadays? "Coo, I did wish, miss, that I'd had time to save—" What? Some snapshots she had taken, of Dignity in an unguarded moment, rightly she mourned these as irreplaceable; three pounds of turnip-tops, particularly fresh and succulent: "I got three pounds as they were there, and you never know when they'll be there again, and had half of them for lunch, thinking, 'Well, I'll have the other half for lunch tomorrow,' and looked forward to it; but— Coo! I wish now I'd eaten them all at once; I *do* like turnip-tops." And a small but treasured half-bottle of rum with which to play hostess for some future happy celebration; I persuaded her that rum, at least, was fairly replaceable (granted that future Happy Occasion—and we all know which she means), but I could see that she still hankered for that exclusive bottle. And, unselfishly, she grieved for a box of stores, which, in obedience to Government hints, she had been gradually accumulating for me during the last few months in case London should be besieged and we be left, like my Uncle Maximilian, with nothing but rats and Marquis Chocolates to go on with: "You know, miss, every time I was going to open a tin of this or a box of that, I said to myself, No, put it in the stores—we'll all be glad of it one day."

And my mother's silver threepenny-bits. I was sorry about those; we found them after her death, in a small wash-leather bag—when I could not but find it touching that they represented her one and only attempt, poor sweet, to save money throughout a gay, charming, extravagant lifetime spent happily in and out of shops. The threepenny-bits were left at home by accident when they moved me down to the country during the big air-raids, six weeks before. But last time Agnes

came down from London to visit me, she had brought them along with other requested items (especially an antique walnut box which I believed held only a few letters and my superfluous birth-certificate). But she had pinned the wash-leather bag into her coat pocket, so it happened that the threepenny bits travelled back to London with her again. She was so distressed over this, now, that to console her and for luck I gave her the threepenny-bit out of my own "lucky" collection of coins: the one with the 1888 date. You will remember that I could not remember why I had kept it? Ten minutes after I had given it to Agnes, I did remember: I used to look on 1888 as a significant date for me, as it was the same as on an attractive old fan which John van Druten had given me, and which I had described in "Monogram." We called it, for various reasons, the Rakonitz fan. The fan, of course, was burnt in the fire, and now I had irrevocably given away the threepenny-bit to Agnes because of Mother's threepenny-bits which were burnt in the fire, and so 1888 and threepence had both gone out of my life. Perhaps I shall have no further need of either: "It will never be the same again"—for better, for worse, we had settled that, an hour ago, up on the downs.

Yet for the next few days, I found it hard to prevent myself from taking a *voyage autour de ma chambre* with the room no longer there. Agnes was no sentimentalist, and was quite unconscious that she encouraged these rambles by still referring to everything in our home in the present tense and in the place where it had always been kept. And indeed, I myself felt that the sitting-room, especially, went on tangibly existing somewhere in space, with its pictures, its books, its furniture, all in the same position where they had been serenely for the last eight years. As though it still stood *solid*, I mean; not romantically, nor in the sense of existing on an-

other plane with past, present and future on ascending spirals. Throughout these chronicles, whenever I promised, "Of this, more hereafter," the phrase was inserted on re-reading them, when I knew already that the journey round my room had become a journey round a room complete, but lost somewhere in space.

All the books, for instance— But they had better be dismissed briefly in those three words: all the books. For anyhow, when I tried to remember the two-thousand-odd which I had browsed among and loved till they were more familiar than my own ten fingers, it is by some funny trick of the mind that the first one to leap up separately as a title was "Beds" by Groucho Marx. "Yes, 'Beds,'" I kept on repeating; but there must have been others! Opening the walnut box, I discovered, however, with surprise and pleasure that it contained my Maundy penny (that excellent present from Gil) and the little seal graven with two arrows and a heart, a present from Moysheh Oyved. But the pretty tortoiseshell étui associated with the same Christmas Eve at Cap-Ferrat, which I had hoped might be inside, was lost in the fire, and so was H. G.'s leather writing-case which he insisted was *not* a Christmas present (my reaction is still like Galileo's); and the ridiculous raffia washing-bag—all belonging to the same group, as you will already have read. And the little Christmas angel which Larry had given me at two A.M. on Christmas morning in New York had gone; and—again in three words—all the horses. And my antique globe of the world, from a Suffolk estuary village. And the old rum-barrel full of my rougher walking-sticks ("rum" seems to recur in this threnody). The rest of my walking-sticks were snatched from their racks in the hall and saved, hastily wrapped in the old brummagem rug which I had bought from a Balkan pedlar in Italy, except for one stick which unluckily I had previously thrust into a

safer place: a beautiful carving of a Chinese boy, pensive, philosophic, but not stricken. I am sorry that he went; and sorriest of all about two of my pictures: "Winter in the Garden," and a seascape of incoming waves misted with cloud and spume. No use pretending, of these, that it will ever be the same again; but I expect the real coast of Kent and the real sky between them, will supply me one day with a tolerable imitation. I am sorry, too, to lose those three small objects on which I had strung my formula in "Monogram": a blue-and-white striped glass dragon from Berlin, a piece of the Grand Canyon bought for a dollar, and a mosaic paperweight which was a relic of my parents' honeymoon in Venice. And the gloves that Mrs. Patrick Campbell gave me; and the snowstorm in a glass bowl from Brighton, which John van Druten gave me; and a silver paper-knife from Bond Street which Clemence Dane gave me; and a blue witch-ball *not* from Bond Street, which Clemence Dane gave me; and a pewter loving-cup which Gladys Calthrop gave me; and the necklace of dragon's bones from San Francisco which Rebecca West gave me; and the gombobble tree Drew brought from Saks on Fifth Avenue, and a model of a Bavarian peasant girl's dower-chest which he got in Munich. And the bit of amber which had belonged to my great-grandfather in Danzig; and the shoe-suitcase; and Humbert Wolfe's poem on white violets which he had been inspired to scribble in atonement for his attack of the fidgets which had wiped out the engagement-list on my sliding pad . . . Indeed I have had some good presents, and there were hundreds of others; these only happened to be in the first haphazard batch remembered; with the graceful little table which Rebecca had found in an antique-shop in the hills of Provence, its drawers stained purple inside from the must of grapes; and the wine-coloured curtain with gold threads, of Chinese weaving, which Uncle

Maximilian Rakonitz had originally brought to Mother from the first Paris Exhibition. And the wineglasses which Olive Wadsley gave me. And the tulip-glasses for old brandy, from Veronica.

But the horse called Brass Monkey is all right. Brass Monkey is at this moment in my hands, its limbs of wooden beads threaded on elastic being twisted and pulled about in an exasperated though affectionate fashion: "Fat lot of use *you* are!" And his reply is still the same: "Don't bother me, don't *bother* me! I'm all unstrung today."

It happened, on the morning after I heard of the fire, that your letter arrived from Canada. And when I say "you," I mean, of course, you-the-unknown-reader. You, she, whichever way you like, said she had been reading "Monogram." (Odd, at this juncture, that it should just have been "Monogram," skipping my three or four books written and published since then.) And after a very charming letter of comment, she quoted, in return for my story of Sir Richard Wallace, the Boulogne Fishwife and the Anonymous Secretary, a 1618 epitaph she had found, to her delight, in Wells Cathedral:

*My worse part lives, my better buried lies,
Death is my life, that he may live who dies.
To earth I trust these ashes and my woe,
Till to the dust I too, as dust, may go.
'Tis thus disconsolate a widow sings
T. P. her cousin hopes for better things.*

"Around this effusion," she says, "was a broken tree; and in a circle below, a broken sword, shoes, tennis bat, dice, violin, and plumed hat!"

I wondered, with her, as to the identity of T. P. and in

what spirit the last line was conceived. Was he a hopeful suitor of the disconsolate widow? I, too, some three hundred and twenty years later, also hope for better things, though I, too; seem to have come to the end of this volume nicely and symbolically surrounded by a broken assortment of tree, sword, shoes, tennis bat, dice, violin and plumed hat.

It is easier to find a good entrance than an equally good exit. A nice old gentleman whom I once knew came up to see me for the first time from his house in Kent. He was perhaps a little shy, so he greeted me with the words: "I've brought you some fruit, mainly apples." But he was not carrying any apples, so I supposed they had been left out in the hall. After his final departure, however, search revealed that he had brought me no fruit, neither mainly apples nor any other variety: they were not in the hall; he had not left them with my cook; nor, as we thought possible, with the porter at the gate; nor, by mistake, in his car, for I had seen him off, and there was no basket of apples anywhere. Still, all my friends enthusiastically agreed that it was a splendid notion to ignore facts and to make an effective entrance or exit with the line: "I've brought you some fruit, mainly apples."

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